

# Fifth International

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## PAKISTAN on the verge of revolution

**SOUTH ASIA SPECIAL**

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# Editorial

Since the appearance of the last issue of Fifth International in February events have continued to bear out the perspectives of our tendency; the world situation is one of mounting instability, caused both by attacks by the ruling class and stiffened resistance from those coming under attack. The third element of the situation is a severe crisis of leadership within the resistance movements.

Events in France indicate all these phenomena. Two years of mass resistance on the streets have ended, thanks to the incapacity for effective leadership of the main forces on the left, both in the unions and the political parties, with the election of Nicolas Sarkozy, the most right wing president for decades.

A vicious assault on the social gains, and trade union rights of the working class, on immigrants and youth, is about to be launched. The fightback by French workers and youth against the French Thatcher and its success is a vital interest for anticapitalists across Europe and beyond.

In the semi-colonial countries on all continents we see regular eruptions of pre-revolutionary situations where reactionary pro-imperialist regimes come under attack on the streets. Recently such a situation has developed in Pakistan.

In this journal Luke Cooper examines the background to the mass opposition to the regime of Pervez Musharraf, a crucial link in American and British imperialisms "war on terror" and its occupation of Afghanistan.

In Sri Lanka both right and left wing bourgeois nationalist parties have combined to launch another bloody offensive against the Tamils, taking advantage of a crisis of leadership in the Tamil Tigers last year. Simon Hardy looks at underlying reasons for the renewed war and how a new strategy is needed if the Tamils are to win their freedom and the workers of the majority community fight back against neoliberalism and the

waste of the country's resources on a reactionary war.

At Heligendamm this month the G8 leaders will gather to shore up their tottering war on terror. Mass terrorists like Bush, Blair and Putin, who have hundreds of thousands of deaths to their charge from Iraq to Chechnya, will discuss how to combine forces to crush the mounting resistance to their rule. Cornered by the undeniable evidence for climate change and the dire consequences for humanity it will bring, the rulers of the world will undoubtedly pretend to do something to "solve" this crisis, just as they pretended to solve the problems of Africans impoverishment two years ago in Gleneagles. The result will be the same.

The leaders of the European Union, under the German presidency will also be discussing how to relaunch the neoliberal offensive which slowed to walking pace due to resistance in France, Italy and Germany in 2005-06. In this issue Martin Suchanek looks at how German imperialism is planning to take the lead in getting the project of an imperialist superstate back on the rails. With a disguised neoliberal 'constitution' and a European 'defence' force capable of mounting aggressive interventions where European imperialism interests are at stake.

The serious failure of the World Social Forum in Nairobi in January, the delays in holding another till 2009, and the postponement of the European Social Forum too, all indicate an anticapitalist movement that has lost its way. Dave Stockton traces the mounting crisis of the movement over the last three years- the challenges to the right wing reformist "leadership" of the WSF and what measures are needed to overcome it.

The forces gathered in Rostock for the G8 have once more have an opportunity to overcome this paralysis. But to do so the left-wing of this movement, those fighting imperialism in Europe, indeed on all continents, need

to unite and take bold initiatives, to mount solidarity with French workers as they face Sarkozy's attack, solidarity with the Palestinian and Iraqi resistance trying to drive out the Zionist and American occupiers, give assistance to Mexican, Iranian, Pakistani, the Egyptian, Zimbabwean and Tamil workers and peasants resisting repression from both pro- and anti-imperialist regimes.

Last but not least this journal records the work of the League for the Fifth International is seeking out co-thinkers in Asia. It is no good revolutionaries analysing a world wide crisis of leadership unless, however slender their resources, they do all in their power to build fighting communist organisations wherever the struggle is fiercest.

We are pleased to record the successes of Revolution and the League in helping our supporters in Pakistan to grow and develop through participation in the movement of resistance to Musharraf. We also are also pleased to record a significant step forward with the agreement we have made with the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka to enter into a period of programmatic and practical discussion with a view to laying the basis for the SPSL to join the League.

In this journal to we are pleased to report the possibility of our Roma comrade Mario Bango' being released after nearly eight years in prison for defending his brother against fascist attack. We appeal to the many people and organisations that have taken up his case to renew pressure on the Slovak authorities to indeed release him immediately.

We also have to mention with sadness the death of Shirley Goodwin a UNISON shop steward in the Health service, who joined Workers Power, British section of the League, toward the end of the Great Miners Strike of 1984-85. We remember with affection her class conscious and internationalist spirit and send our condolences to her lifelong companion Norman.



# Pakistan: on the verge of revolution

## Musharraf, imperialism's gendarme, in peril

*Luke Cooper surveys the background to Pakistan's crisis and outlines the growing isolation of the military regime, the mounting movement of marches, strikes and armed clashes against the dictatorship, and the way forward for the working class and the poor*

Towards the end of 2006 there was talk in the Pakistan press that 2007 might prove a "difficult" year for President Musharraf. The military Chief of Staff who seized power in 1999 was hoping to extend his five-year term, granted him unconstitutionally by the provincial and national assemblies in 2002. But Musharraf has become deeply unpopular in his own country because of his unflinching support for George Bush's "war on terror." At the same time he has become unpopular with the White House for failing to root out the Taliban bases in Pakistan's tribal areas.

Today we can see that predictions of a year of difficulties were, to put it mildly, an understatement. Speculation has now shifted to the theme – "can Musharraf survive?" The suspension of the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, by the President prompted protests by lawyers that, by mid-May, had grown into mass demonstrations, armed street battles and a nationwide general strike paralysing all the main cities. In short, Pakistan had entered a pre-revolutionary crisis.

### MUSHARRAF'S COUP

On 12 October 1999 a military coup overthrew the government of Nawaz Sharif. In a dramatic series of events Sharif had removed the head of the Pakistan Army, General Pervez Musharraf, whilst the latter was out of the country. When Musharraf returned his aircraft was refused permission to land and circled Karachi airport, landing only after the coup had taken place and with only a few minutes flying time of its fuel remaining.

Sharif's party, the Pakistan Muslim League N (Nawaz), had won the 1997 elections by a landslide. This was Sharif's second term in office. The first started in November 1990 and ended in 1993 with resignation, amidst corruption charges. Conscious of role of the Pakistan judi-

ary in his previous political demise, Sharif's second term in office was marked by attempts to massively concentrate power in his own hands, in the process making many enemies in Pakistan's parliament, judiciary and military. Ironically in 1998 Pervez Musharraf benefited from Sharif's purging of 'disloyal' generals, leapfrogging several more senior officers to become the army's Chief of Staff in 1998.

Though Sharif's authoritarian attitude to the military won him few friends amongst the Pakistani ruling class, what proved his undoing was the deep economic and political crisis that Pakistan plunged into between 1998 and 1999. The country had suffered badly from the fallout of the 1997 East Asian financial crisis, accumulating domestic and foreign debts to the tune of \$43 billion. As the economy faltered, there was a headlong flight of capital out of the country – unstoppable for those who played by the rules of neoliberal globalisation. In addition, in 1998 Pakistan had become embroiled in a nuclear stand off with India, after both states tested nuclear weapons. The US-inspired international sanctions that followed only exacerbated the economic turmoil within Pakistan.

The successful testing of nuclear weapons by Pakistan prompted the military and the powerful Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) into a military adventure. They deepened their support for incursions into Indian-occupied Kashmir by armed jihadi groups, such as Lakshar-e-Taiba and Harkat-al-Mujahideen. General Musharraf himself ordered Pakistani troops, dressed as jihadis, to seize strategically important positions in the town of Kargil before the Indian army could reoccupy posts they had abandoned for the winter months. The Pakistani armed forces made significant territorial gains.<sup>1</sup> But it ended in a political disaster.

Tit-for-tat shelling in a four-month



stand off ensued, with both sides making thinly veiled threats that they might have recourse to nuclear weapons. Pakistan throughout operated a policy of "plausible deniability" – claiming that its forces were not involved in the fighting and that the guerrillas were simply Kashmiri Muslims, outside of their control. As the crisis deepened the forces of world imperialism tightened the screws on the Sharif government. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund froze the loans that were keeping the Pakistani economy afloat. On a trip to Washington to solicit aid from Bill Clinton, Sharif received a harsh ultimatum instead. Pakistan must either withdraw all its forces at once or face outright condemnation from US imperialism and further economic sanctions which would deepen the country's crisis.

Thus Sharif was faced with the task of ordering the Army and the ISI to retreat from Kargil, with not as much as a face-saving concession from India. Pakistan's top generals were furious. Sharif had hoped that joining the elite nuclear club and waging a border conflict with India would generate enough nationalist fervour to save his government. Musharraf had actually been consulted on the withdrawal and raised no objections to it. But when faced with angry army officers asking why he had climbed down, he put all the blame on Sharif.<sup>2</sup>

Sharif and Musharraf were obviously heading for a serious confrontation and there was talk of a possible military coup. Musharraf moved to demote supporters of Sharif within the armed forces, whilst Sharif prepared to "retire" Musharraf. Sharif also solicited the support of the US government, sending his brother to Washington to warn of the threat of a coup and offer Bill Clinton a deal he could not refuse: in return for public support Sharif would close the camps training jihadi militants on the Afghan border and even send a special forces team to bring him the head of Osama Bin Laden.<sup>3</sup> The Clinton Administration did indeed make statements that, while not explicitly supporting Sharif, urged all parties in Pakistan to respect constitutional democratic rule.<sup>4</sup>

Thus it was that after the October 12th military coup Musharraf declared himself Pakistan's "chief executive". In the two years of Sharif's government he had achieved a meteoric rise to power – from being only one of several generals, to



Protest against Musharraf, May 2007

Chief of Staff and finally Head of State.

The unpopularity of the Sharif regime meant that the coup passed with little popular protest. Indeed, the main bourgeois opposition party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by Benazir Bhutto, actually welcomed the coup, only asking the military to move quickly to hold "free and fair elections".<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Imran Khan's Justice Party said the military coup was "sadly inevitable" given the disaster that had beset Sharif's rule.<sup>6</sup> Such foolish compliance by the "democratic" bourgeois parties gave them little room for manoeuvre or much public sympathy when Musharraf later tightened his grip on power.

Though Musharraf faced very little domestic opposition he had one major problem. The last coup of the 20th century, unlike most of those that preceded it, had not been the outcome of a Central

Intelligence Agency (CIA) directive. Quite the opposite, it was unsanctioned. The hawkish American journal *Foreign Affairs* summed up the mood of much of the American ruling class, when it mused: "exactly where Musharraf stood on using nuclear weapons, transferring nuclear technology to Islamic fundamentalist friends, or provoking further conflict with long time enemy India was a bleak and scary unknown."<sup>7</sup>

Certainly Musharraf was not looking for a conflict with America. On the contrary he wanted to maintain Pakistan's historic client relationship, dating from the Cold War when India was "non-aligned" and consequently regarded by the USA as a disguised client of the USSR. Pakistan, armed to the teeth by Washington, was one of the latter's regional gendarmes. It had played a crucial role in Washington's proxy war to destabilise the pro-Soviet Afghan regime





Lawyers burn effigy of the President

between 1978 and 1992. Likewise it was an essential check on the hostile Iranian regime.

The problem Musharraf faced was how to combine this crucial external alliance with equally historic domestic and regional policies of Pakistan's ruling class: the alliance with the Pashtun tribes of the northwest frontier and intervention in Afghanistan to ensure a friendly regime there. The Pakistan military's sponsorship of the 1996-2001 Taliban regime would, particularly after 9/11, lead to a head on clash with the geopolitical strategy of the United States.

### POLITICAL ISLAMISM AND THE MILITARY

The role of political Islam in Pakistan is a complex one. At the time of partition the country was founded as a Muslim state and thus Islam has always played an important role in political life. Outright secularism, such as India's, has never been a significant political trend. Nevertheless at one level political parties and movements are usually described by their position on a spectrum stretching from muslim "modernisers" or "moderates" to "fundamentalists". The dominant bourgeois political parties have traditionally held to a moderate view of Islam, seeing it as quite compatible with a modern market economy and close collaboration with the west. On the other hand the fundamentalists want to see a society operating on the basis of Sharia

law and even point to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as a model, one which some madrassahs or Islamic schools in Pakistan had an important role in generating. While most of the main Pakistani political parties are categorised as either "moderate" or "fundamentalist", it actually reveals little about the true political and social dynamics of the country.

This is because "moderates" in Pakistan's establishment have frequently turned to political Islam and radical Islamic forces to stabilise their rule, particularly since General Zia ul-Haq took power in a military coup in 1977. He cultivated support amongst radical Islamic currents by integrating elements of Sharia law into Pakistan's legal code. By appealing to Islam to give his dictatorial regime a *raison d'être* and cultivating radical Islamic supporters on the streets, Zia was able to offset the dangers of a popular revolt against him. Critically, Zia took advantage of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to deepen his links with the United States and aid them in fighting a war by proxy – by arming the Islamic militants of the Mujahideen.

It was in this period that Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence agency (ISI) assumed a critical role not only in aiding the CIA's operations in Afghanistan, but also in policing and organising Pakistan's politics. The ISI formed the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) as a sectarian party, who purported to represent the Muhajir, the Urdu speaking ethnic group

who migrated to Pakistan from India following the reactionary partition in 1947. This was part of a campaign by Zia to break the hold of the PPP in Sindh province, traditionally their stronghold, by dividing their popular support on ethnic lines. The MQM were, and still are, a fascistic organisation that practices communalist violence against non-Mujahir ethnic and religious groups. In addition, the ISI encouraged the development of increasing sectarian religious violence between Shia and Sunni throughout the 1980s. Thus the military regime has "popular" street forces at its disposal, highly armed and able to count on the benevolent neutrality if not outright support of the military. They can be used against political opponents of the regime and workers in struggle. It derives power as a bonapartist regime by fomenting conflict and then "keeping order."

### INTER-SERVICE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

For Zia and the Pakistani military, encouraging sectarian divisions and cultivating pro-regime reactionary organisations were key to maintaining their rule. Indeed, the fact that a number of contemporary fundamentalist Islamic groups in Pakistan trace their lineage to the Zia regime is not simply because he popularised radical Islam, but because the ISI in particular gave material support to their development, seeing them as a powerful force with which to keep down the working class. In the post-Zia years the ISI has continued to be associated with radical Islamic groups domestically and in Kashmir and Afghanistan. This has given the ISI a reputation as a rogue force, operating as a "state within a state", with a number of elements within its ranks that have genuine political sympathies for such forces.<sup>8</sup>

The military however do not simply represent the same interests as the ISI. Its traditional "governmental" role in Pakistan – half the lifetime of the state has been under military regimes – has not only created a culture of political interference within its ranks. It has also accumulated a substantial social-economic stake in society at large. Indeed it is a major property owner, which gives it the material power to develop substantial networks of patronage.<sup>9</sup> As Ayesha Siddiqi notes, the military's vast economic interests include "four military welfare foundations (valued at around \$2



billion)... [and] hundreds of large-, medium- and small-scale business ventures which the military more or less directly runs. For instance, one major cargo transport giant is a military firm; and other army units have run everything from petrol-pumps to toll-levees on a national highway. The estimated total worth of this economy exceeds \$100 billion."<sup>10</sup>

So, to speak of "the military" in Pakistan is to describe much more than the armed wing of the bourgeois state – rather, it is a substantial political and economic force in its own right. As such, it seeks to maintain Pakistan's integration into the world capitalist system and ideologically sees itself as a "modernist" trend in Pakistan. However it combines this with a powerful sense of pragmatism and realpolitik. This extends to international relations too; it places strategic value in fostering an alliance with the United States, in recognition of its global economic and political hegemony, while also pursuing its own regional interests forthrightly. It is as we have said one of the USA's gendarmes, albeit one that can get out of control in certain circumstances.

## THE UNITED STATES AND THE ISLAMISTS

Musharraf's period in power has, from the very outset, grappled with the problem that these roles have begun to conflict with one another. In order to repair relations with the USA, Musharraf did not plan to continue the Kargil War, but he hoped that Washington would intervene to force negotiations over a Kashmir settlement. This hope was in vain. The USA had not supported the coup and Clinton remained hostile; in his visit in March 2000 he explicitly criticised the coup and made it clear the US would not oversee negotiations on Kashmir.<sup>11</sup> Musharraf did not help his case by telling Clinton, probably correctly, that the Pakistan-led raid to seize Bin Laden, which Sharif had promised, was a pipe dream.<sup>12</sup> Moreover Pakistan would remain one of the only international states to recognise the Taliban regime in Kabul.

At home, Musharraf had to consolidate his power. The support the PPP had given to the coup gave him the room to manoeuvre he needed and he suspended the constitution and proceeded to try Sharif on terrorism and corruption

charges. In May 2001 the Supreme Court legalised his regime on the basis that the army had "acted in the interests of the people", just as they had done for the military dictatorships installed in 1958 and 1977.<sup>13</sup> In June 2001 Musharraf formally became president. In the referendum that followed (the opposition boycotted it), Musharraf was granted a five year term – subject to being elected by the incoming provincial and national assemblies, elections for which the Supreme Court committed him to holding in 2002.

This meant that Musharraf needed to assemble some sort of political force to support him. He did so not on the basis of ideology but patronage. He was able to win the support of the large Pakistani landlords in the national assembly – who had supported Zia's regime and, indeed, rarely sat with the opposition. In addition, he won defectors from Sharif's party, by harnessing the economic power of the military: his new loyalists realised they would be richly rewarded. In the same manner he later purchased votes of PPP assembly members to establish a secure majority.

In this way the Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam) (PML-Q) was formed. In addition, Musharraf continued the military's historic engagement with fascist sectarian and Islamic forces – the MQM supported his rule and episodic agreements have also been struck with an alliance of fundamentalist groups, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). Despite piecing together this alliance, the Pakistan military is widely believed to have rigged the 2002 elections that returned Musharraf to power for five years.

## SEPTEMBER 11 2001: A DECISIVE CHANGE?

The question of how Musharraf and the army related to the country's Islamist forces became a critical one for the regime after the 9/11 attacks. The USA made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that Pakistan had to choose the Taliban regime and its Pakistani supporters or the world policeman. Bush sent his pro-consul Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, to make this brutally clear to Musharraf. On 12 September he demanded that Pakistan support the "war on terror" or face "being bombed back to the stone age."<sup>14</sup> For Musharraf, there was no point continuing to support

the Taliban once it was clear the Americans were going to overthrow them. So, he made a snap decision, acceding to all Armitage's demands even before he consulted Pakistan's military top brass.<sup>15</sup>

The dramatic change in policy was to define the Musharraf regime. By giving unequivocal support for the "war on terror", Musharraf immediately won some \$1 billion dollars in aid and debt restructuring from the USA. He also rebranded himself to the world as a moderate, western-minded progressive who was fighting Islamic fundamentalism at home. While Bill Clinton had castigated Musharraf publicly for stifling democracy, the new line in Washington was that "the uniform issue" was an internal matter for Pakistan and it was not their place to comment.

However, Musharraf's new policy was soon to be tested to breaking point. In December 2001 two Islamic militant groups, both historically linked to the ISI, the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), launched an attack on the Indian parliament building, leaving fourteen dead. A military stand off between India and Pakistan ensued with both launching a troop build-up either side of the "line of control" between Indian and Pakistani occupied parts of Kashmir. Musharraf's handling of the crisis expressed the new turn he had agreed with Richard Armitage. Despite not wanting to lose face at home by conceding too quickly to Indian demands, the crisis was eventually defused because Musharraf made assurances that he would move against the Islamic radicals in Pakistan and rein in their international operations.

In the period since, it is debatable to what extent Musharraf actually has or even could rein in Islamic militants. First, as outlined above, the Pakistani military and the ISI had for over twenty years developed extensive links with Islamist radical forces, particularly those fighting in Kashmir. However, they were not simply under the control of the military and had become real 'social movements' in their own right, via their madrassahs and charitable foundations. As Lal Khan argues the state had created "Frankenstein monsters now outside their control".<sup>16</sup>

Second, moving against the Islamic militants conflicted with Musharraf's over-riding aim: to survive in power at all



costs. To get round this problem, Musharraf has played a clever game, manipulating appearance and reality.

He has staged a series of conflicts with the Islamic fundamentalists, only to climb down and concede to their demands.<sup>17</sup>

For instance, in 2006 Musharraf sent a draft to the national assembly to amend the deeply reactionary rape laws brought in by Zia in 1979 – it outraged the Islamists and was withdrawn.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, in 2004 Musharraf proposed

a change in the law that would mean passport applicants did not have to declare their religion – it outraged the Islamists and was withdrawn.<sup>19</sup> In this way, Musharraf can present himself as trying, in a “difficult situation”, to fight the Islamists while in fact conceding to their demands and leaning on them for support.

On the military terrain Musharraf has also failed to defeat the militants using Southern Waziristan as a base for operations against British and American forces

in Afghanistan. In 2002, on the orders of the United States, Musharraf established military bases in the region. The Pakistani army has since waged a protracted armed conflict but one that it has effectively lost – signing peace treaties with militants in 2004 and again in 2006. This stop-start conflict contrasts with the continuous eight year struggle the army has waged against separatists in Balochistan – who are demanding the region benefits from its oil and gas reserves.

# International Marxist Tendency in Pakistan

**T**he Struggle is the Pakistani section of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT), well known internationally for its enthusiastic support for Hugo Chavez and the “Bolivarian Revolution”. It is one of the IMT’s largest sections, claiming over 2,000 members at their last national conference. In his article, written on the movement at the end of March, Alan Woods, the IMT’s main international leader and theorist, outlined their perspective. He argued that the movement could have been turned into a revolutionary struggle against the regime, but lacked the leadership and this is to be expected given the lawyers are part of the middle class intelligentsia. He continued by criticising the opposition parties for their call for Musharraf to resign or face being thrown out of power, arguing that ‘these were just words’ and because of this ‘the movement would end up in a dead end.’<sup>27</sup>

What is immediately striking about this statement is how quickly it was proven wrong by events. However, Woods is not simply guilty of an error of calculation, but rather of an erroneous method. He has made the classical centrist<sup>38</sup> error of confusing the leadership of the movement with its base. What is worse is that Woods makes no demands on the leadership to take the struggle further and generalise it into a movement against the regime. In doing so, Woods lets the leadership of the movement off the hook – as he excuses them for their timidity because this is what bourgeois leaders do. While true enough in the abstract, the point is Woods makes no demands for action that challenge them.

Woods then deepens his errors. He points to how The Struggle has participated in the lawyers’ movement but argues they are too weak to assume the national leadership of the movement.<sup>39</sup> This poses the question – what programme do they advance for the movement, i.e. what is the political basis for their alternative leadership? Woods’ response to this question is to make an abstract critique of capitalism and the need for socialism based on the nationalisation of industry.<sup>40</sup> As a means to this end Woods argues Marxists support all struggles for democracy – freedom of assembly, free and fair elections, and so forth.<sup>41</sup> In addition, Woods points to the centrality of the working class and the masses, arguing that only when they are mobilised will the regime be threatened. Thus for Woods the lawyers’ movement, without the workers, are doomed to defeat. Not only does this assume that workers will not join the movement, it critically does not call on them to do so – i.e. he does not stress the revolutionary possibility in the situation.

Moreover, while Woods makes a critique of the bourgeois state, this does not inform the political strategy he puts forward. Woods calls for democracy and socialism without pointing to the obstacle the bourgeois state presents to the socialist goal, as it is an armed force that will ultimately defend capital. For Marxists, the practical strategic consequence of this is that the state will need to be smashed in a revolution, replaced by a state of the armed workers and peasants, organised in democratic councils.<sup>42</sup> What underpins Woods’ position methodologically

is a processist view of the development of revolutionary struggle, whereby the job of Marxists is to make abstract propaganda for socialism and the objective process should do the job of developing the class struggle.

This comes across particularly in the article of Lal Khan, written after the violence in Karachi. While Khan makes an interesting and informative analysis of the reactionary MQM and their relationship to the military, the strategy he advances is completely insufficient. The IMT are deep entryists in the bourgeois PPP and Khan argues that the current movement is likely to lead to a PPP government. For Khan, this would not mark a defeat for the movement and the bourgeoisie diverting workers away from the struggle for power, but is to be welcomed as it would deepen the crisis further and lead to “revolution or counter-revolution”.<sup>43</sup> Again, the objective process is asked to do the job of leading the working class to revolution and thus, the IMT are not obliged to advance a revolutionary programme in the current pre-revolutionary situation, i.e. workers and peasant councils, armed militia, indefinite general strike, insurrection, a workers government.

In this the IMT reveals that it is marred by the same political error that brought about the collapse of the Fourth International as an instrument of workers’ revolution – the anti-Leninist and anti-Trotskyist theory, adopted in 1951, of the automatic development of reformist parties under the pressure of the struggle into instruments capable of effecting socialist revolution.



## MUSHARRAF'S OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE WORKING CLASS

Immediately after his coup, Musharraf's key concern was to restore the confidence of the international money markets in Pakistan's crisis-ridden economy. He went to the International Monetary Fund to secure a loan to keep the economy afloat. As a condition the IMF demanded its usual package of attacks on the living standards of the masses.

This took the form of a tax on the sale of food stuffs, which angered Pakistan's traders. Musharraf faced the traders' protests down, imposed the tax and secured the loan. At the same time, as a sop to the traditional strata, he withdrew proposals to weaken the country's blasphemy laws because of opposition from the mullahs. This pattern of intransigence on the neoliberal reforms and softness on Islamic forces has been a feature of his rule.<sup>20</sup>

On the insistence of the IMF, World Bank and Pakistan's own bourgeoisie, Musharraf has launched a series of fierce neoliberal attacks on the working class. He has aggressively sought to raise the level of exploitation of Pakistani workers and increase labour movement flexibility, bringing forward changes to Pakistan's labour code that "effectively increased daily work hours, reduced overtime compensation, and created a new category of 'contract worker' not entitled to legal compensation for overtime work."<sup>21</sup> The unions and NGOs described the changes as taking workers' rights "back to the 17th century."<sup>22</sup>

These attacks on workers' rights have gone alongside a huge programme of privatisation. Between 1999 and 2006 \$5 billion dollars<sup>23</sup> of state assets were sold off, including telecommunications and energy. Typically, they were sold on the cheap to friends and family of top level military personnel themselves. This, added to the generous debt restructuring and aid programmes Musharraf received by acquiescing to the demands of US policy makers, has created something of an economic boom. This is expressed in a year-on-year growth of gross domestic product, a booming stock market, an external debt reduced to 52% of GDP (down from 80% in 1999) and the establishment of relatively strong foreign exchange reserves.<sup>24</sup> Typically for neoliberal development programmes the bene-



Police attack lawyers

fits of this economic boom accrued overwhelmingly to the rich. Indeed, Pakistan has seen a sharp increase in its "Gini Coefficient" – a commonly used measurement of income inequality.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, a recent World Bank report claimed that 72% of Pakistan's

## Attacks on workers' rights have gone alongside a huge programme of privatisation. Between 1999 and 2006 \$5 billion dollars of state assets were sold off

people live below the poverty line.<sup>26</sup>

In agriculture the military has pursued an aggressive policy of dispossessing poor peasant tenants on state-owned land and transferring control of production to military personnel in return for modest rents – a process that has led to it controlling some 11.58 million acres.<sup>27</sup> The land that is now owned by the military and the state is exploited by a handful of landowning families who run vast

estates. This gives agriculture in Pakistan a semi-feudal character as the oppressed peasants in both military and private estates are treated economically and socially like serfs – with little opportunity to move off the land and forced to give up a substantial part of their crop to the landowners.<sup>28</sup> This has led to the emergence of peasant movements demanding land to those who till it and in February a mass conference brought together some 6,000 people.<sup>29</sup>

The working class too has mobilised against the neoliberal attacks. Indeed, Musharraf's rule has been marked by persistent, if sectional, conflicts with workers. For instance, in the last period telecom workers fought government privatisation plans and the rail workers operated a work to rule against breaches of health and safety regulations. The number of struggles (these are just a few examples) is significant because of the historic weakness of Pakistan's union movement. The Pakistan labour force numbers a total of 48 million out of a population of 150 million, and of these just one million (three per cent) are organised in the trade unions; even these are dispersed across some 7,204 unions.<sup>30</sup>

The trade union movement has historically been marked by political divisions stretching back to the regime of Zulfikar



Ali Bhutto, Benazir's father, who was overthrown by Genral Zia-ul-Haq in 1977 and judicially murdered in 1979. In this period rival PPP and Islamic federations were formed. These divisions, combined with fierce state repression, have led to the unions' weakness. While Zia

and the military peddled a ferocious anti-worker programme, none of the political forces in Pakistan have a clean record.<sup>31</sup> For example, though under Bhutto the trade union movement reached its peak with high union density and militant organisation, he later unleashed a reign

of terror against the trade union leadership and workers, with police even firing at striking Landhi workers in 1972.<sup>32</sup>

Over several decades trade unions in Pakistan have become used to fierce state repression. As one would expect, this has intensified under Musharraf, with arrests

# The Programme of Permanent Revolution

The working class and the rural and urban masses must now be won to the struggle for power – to end the rule of capital and establish a working class state that gives land to the peasants. As the Russian Revolutionary Leon Trotsky argued in 1917 the revolution must be “made permanent” – i.e. it must continue from the national democratic struggle to the struggle for working class power and world socialist revolution.

This can be done! The working class can be won to action aimed at their self-emancipation – if revolutionaries advance a programme of action that links the struggle for democracy with the struggle for power:

- **For an all out general strike to bring down the military regime!**

The working class responded to the repression in Karachi with heroism and defiance. By paralysing all the main cities it showed it has the power to bring down the regime – now it must take the indefinite action that can bring down the government.

- **No to a “civilian government”! Yes to a revolutionary constituent assembly!**

This great mass movement must oppose all attempts at installing an undemocratic “transitional” civilian government. Such a call is designed to demobilise the masses, just at the time when they should be going on the offensive. We fight for the popular movement to convene a democratic assembly elected by local assemblies and recallable by them.

- **Continue the struggle against capital! For an agrarian revolution!**

The immediate tasks of the constituent assembly must be to reverse the neoliberal programme of the Musharraf regime, bring the criminal military junta to justice. To sweep away the military dictatorship and ensure it can never be replaced, we fight within a constituent assembly to continue the class struggle against the capitalists and the big landlords by enacting an agrarian revolu-

tion that will give the land to those who till it, encouraging the peasants to organise cooperatives if they so wish.

- **For committees of action of both workers and peasants!**

In every workplace we fight for the formation of workers committees to organise mass action to bring down the regime. We fight for the formation out of these of city wide, regional and national committees of action to organise a national struggle for working class power. We fight for similar committees in the countryside as organs of agrarian revolution.

- **For a workers and peasants government based on councils of delegates and a mass people's militia!**

Only the working class, allied with the poor peasants and the urban poor can form a government that will solve the great questions facing the country. To do so requires more than parliamentary elections – which cannot transfer power from one class to another – it requires a socialist revolution: the disbanding of the bourgeois state machine and its replacement with councils of recallable delegates.

- **Workers control of production, nationalisation of big foreign multinationals!**

The workers committees must combine the struggle against the regime with the struggle against capital. They should fight for nationalisation of major industries and banks, without compensation, and for them to be placed under workers control. We fight for an economy democratically planned for need, separation of religion and the state and equality of all faiths before the law.

- **For workers self defence squads!**

We fight to defend the mass movement from repression by the army or reactionary thugs like the MQM. To this end we fight for the arming of the working class and the disbandment of state instruments of repression – the police and ISI security services.

- **For rank and file soldiers' committees in the army!**

For soldiers to disobey any orders to turn their guns on the people! We fight to organise the rank and file soldiers in the army who have no interest in maintaining the rule of this corrupt dictatorship.

- **Bring women into the struggle! For equality and liberation!**

Women must be brought into the struggle for an end to military rule. This struggle must go hand in hand with the fight for the social, political and economic equality of women.

- **Down with imperialism!**

Victory to the resistance in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan! The struggle against Musharraf is part of a global struggle against imperialism – and his overthrow will be a huge blow to US domination and the so-called “war on terror.”

- **For a new world party of social revolution – the Fifth International!**

The struggle in Pakistan is part of a global struggle by the working class against capitalism. To lead this struggle workers need a new global party of socialist revolution, fighting on every front to turn the struggles of today towards the conquest of power by the working class. In the history of the workers movement there have been four such internationals – today we must forge a new party, the Fifth International, to fight for socialism in the 21st century!

- **For world revolution and socialism!**

The struggle in Pakistan can be the first step in a world socialist revolution – if the working class come to the head of the struggle and fight for a workers state and win the peasants to the side by fighting for an agrarian revolution! This can be the first act in a world revolution against capitalism! A victory of the workers in Pakistan can inspire socialist revolution in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and India. For a socialist federation of South Asia!



of trade union activists and attacks by Islamists commonplace. For example, in April employers at the Taunsa Barrage construction site filed reports with the police accusing trade union organisers struggling for the eight hour day (they are currently made to work fourteen to sixteen hours) of terrorism and disrupting state functions.<sup>33</sup> Typically, such charges will be brought by the police after the struggle, with the organisers targeted once the workers have demobilised.

### IS MUSHARRAF FINISHED?

State repression, reactionary Islamist and communalist harassment and low trade union density make the struggles of the last period all the more remarkable. One of the most militant sections of workers has been the Pakistan steel workers. In March 2002 they occupied a number of steel plants against a corrupt military colonel who had been making dangerous cuts to maintenance in order to siphon off personal profits – through militant action including a highway blockade the workers quickly won all their demands.<sup>34</sup> However, this militancy did not stop the military attempting to sell off Pakistan Steel as part of their privatisation programme in 2006. The government proposed to sell the asset with a market value of around 700 billion rupees for just 21.6 billion rupees, sparking the mobilisation of the workers in a high profile campaign.

In a supreme court hearing the then Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry declared the privatisation unlawful – a decision that enraged the regime. In doing so, Chaudhry, whether it was his intent or not, established himself as a thorn in the side of the regime. After all, Pakistan's judiciary has historically been completely subservient to the wishes and ambitions of the military. The defeat on privatisation must have been all the more bitter a pill to swallow, given Musharraf had appointed Chaudhry as Chief Justice in 2005 and expected him to be a compliant servant of the regime.

This defeat in the courts alarmed Musharraf. He desperately wanted to maintain his and the army's rule beyond the five year mandate he received in 2002. Thus he had two choices. He could have the existing pro-regime local and provincial assemblies elect him (in clear breach of the constitution) or he could



call new elections and rig them. Either way, he would need the support of the judiciary. This led Musharraf to move quickly. In an act reminiscent of the ruthlessness he had shown when he demoted key supporters of Nawaz Sharif in the army prior to the coup, he suspended Justice Chaudhry at the beginning of March. He charged him with unspecified acts of "misconduct", "misuse of authority" and "actions prejudicial to the dignity of office of the chief justice of Pakistan".

In response thousands of lawyers across Pakistan boycotted courts and protested against the regime. In the weeks that followed the movement became an outlet for the growing discontent with the corrupt and pro-imperialist regime.<sup>35</sup> The demand of the lawyers was for an independent judiciary.

What attitude should Marxists adopt to these movements? First, the slogan of an independent judiciary was a progressive

one in this instance insofar as it meant independence from military rule. Of course, for Marxists the judiciary is never "independent" but a privileged component of the bourgeois state that will ultimately defend capital against the workers.<sup>36</sup> But the importance of the lawyers' movement was that it could act as a springboard to a mass movement against military rule. From the outset by openly challenging Musharraf it had an anti-regime dynamic despite the weak slogans of its leadership.

In Pakistan the REVOLUTION youth group and supporters of the League for the Fifth International participated actively in the movement, recognising it had the potential to be transformed into a mass movement against military rule. The central question was fighting to bring in wider layers beyond the lawyers and generalise it into a struggle to overthrow the regime. As we argued in March: "The protests certainly have the



potential to be transformed into a mass movement against military rule. Many of the leaders of the working class organisations and social movements openly oppose the dictatorship but now must be the time for action not words. We need mass demonstrations, blockades, strikes and direct actions to bring down the regime."

We argued the movement had to turn towards the working class, and the working class movement should involve itself to the full with the movement against the regime. In this way, the struggle for the overthrow of the regime could be linked to the class struggle of the workers against the bosses and neoliberalism. We argued the working class needed to elect democratic committees of delegates in every workplace, co-ordinated across towns, regions and nationally, to advance this struggle. In addition, the clear democratic demand to advance must be for a sovereign constituent assembly, under the control of the mass movement. If this demand were won, in such an assembly the working class political forces must propose the expropriation of the rich landowners and the capitalists and fight for a workers' and peasants government, based on the action councils. It must fight too for an immediate break with the USA, the expulsion of its military personnel from the country and an end to all support for its "war on terror". In short, the goal of Marxists is to bring the working class to the head of the struggle, to turn the struggle for democracy, for land and higher wages, the basic needs of the unemployed, into a fight for working class power and socialism."

A major turning point for this movement came in Lahore when tens of thousands of people turned out to greet Justice Chaudhry, whose motorcade numbered some 2,000 vehicles, as it travelled to the city from Islamabad. Chaudhry was addressing a meeting of the Lahore High Court Bar Association. The size and militancy of the demonstration marked a profound challenge to the rule of Musharraf. To back down and drop the suspension of Chaudhry would have shown serious weakness and marked a major victory for the opposition, emboldening them to make yet more challenges. Thus, to maintain his power, Musharraf was left with little option to fight back aggressively. To do so he looked to the military's old friends in the MQM. By using a proxy, he could

later distance himself from the violence while sending the same message to the masses: "defy military rule at your peril".

On 12 May Chaudhry was due to speak in Karachi in Sindh province. It was because Karachi has a left-wing tradition that the ISI had set up the MQM in the first place. Now, they called on their fascistic shock troops to break up the opposition rally by force. On Friday 11 May the MQM blockaded the main roads into the city in an attempt to prevent the rally from taking place, with the open complicity of government agencies. In Karachi that week, in a bid to muzzle media reporting of the anti-government protests, state forces closed three television stations.

Despite this thousands of protesters defiantly mobilised, and as they rallied the MQM opened fire and several hours of pitched battles ensued. Musharraf ordered some 14,000 troops on to the streets of Karachi and the Chief Justice was detained at the airport by the security forces. The clashes continued into Sunday with the government operating a policy of undeclared marshal law. "Assemblies" of over five people were banned and the Sindh provincial government, which is pro-Musharraf, said it would expel leading opposition activists from the province. The fighting continued into the following week with low level fighting still reported. Over 50 people are reported to have been killed and some 150 more injured.

Musharraf now had the blood of his own people on his hands. Nevertheless he was cold and defiant as he addressed his supporters in the more moderate Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam) at a rally in Islamabad on 12th May. This rally had been planned for a number of weeks with many state employees forced to attend and participants even promised as much as one thousand rupees (12 euros)! Despite this Musharraf only managed to gather 20,000 "supporters". He blamed the unrest in Karachi on the protesters who had "politicised the suspension of the Chief Judge" and pointed to the MQM rally as evidence of his continued popular support – the MQM rally had, of course, been allowed to take place without interference on Saturday.

Musharraf added that he would seek re-election from the sitting provincial and national assemblies this year for another five-year term and declared the "people are with me". This would be

done, he argued, without any new elections for the provisional and national assemblies. On Monday 14 May it had become clear that "the people" were not with Musharraf, since all the large cities were paralysed by a national strike called by the bourgeois parties in the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy – particularly the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (N). The fact that these parties called such action is an indicator of the tremendous pressure from below. The working class had responded to the crackdown on dissent with sheer defiance.

As the lawyers' movement had gathered momentum the bourgeois parties, particularly the PML-N and PPP, had begun to organise in it. However, they had not expected the movement and during Musharraf's rule the opposition they had mounted was focused on parliamentary manoeuvres. In addition, the two parties had both lost members to Musharraf's regime, attracted by corrupt financial incentives. Even during the movement the PPP had admitted it was in talks with Musharraf to do a deal but these had broken down on Musharraf's insistence that he would remain both head of the army and state. Neither of these parties offers a programme qualitatively different to that of Musharraf. They are both bosses' parties who will observe the dictates of the West – both economic neoliberalism and support for the war on terror, albeit the PML(N) is less overtly pro-West, appealing as it does for support on the basis of conservative, Islamic values. Both of these parties express continuity with corrupt "democratic" bourgeois regimes of the 1990s.

The support they have given to the movement, including the dramatic strike action on May 14, indicate the massive pressure for change from the masses. Pakistan had clearly entered a pre-revolutionary situation, i.e. to say one that could quickly be turned into a revolutionary situation, or suffer defeats that push it backwards. In this situation, there is a clear opportunity for a revolutionary struggle for power by the working class that fights for a workers' and peasants' government, based on democratic councils and established through a revolutionary uprising. The real danger now is that the PPP and PML(N) could lead the movement into a reactionary settlement based upon an undemocratic



"civilian" government of technocrats and bourgeois politicians.

It is vital revolutionaries warn of this danger and advance as an alternative a revolutionary constituent assembly – under the democratic control of local popular assemblies. Its deputies should be instantly recallable by their electors. As the "highest" form of bourgeois democracy, we of course recognise that this is no substitute for a government based on the power of the armed workers and peasants. This is why in any constituent assembly workers continue the class struggle; fighting to expropriate the bourgeoisie and form a workers and peasants government.

On 14 May the working class, by paralysing the cities with strike action, have demonstrated in practice they have a leading role to play in revolutionary struggle to overthrow the regime. It is now vital that a revolutionary party of the most advanced workers is formed in Pakistan, committed to leading the struggle of the working class and peasants against the regime to the conquest of power. This is what the League for the Fifth International and our supporters in Pakistan are fighting for.

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when they were a large force in Britain's Labour Party. More recently, they have maintained this view in relation to the revolutionary developments in Venezuela.

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# A step towards re

The first political party to be founded in the British colony of Ceylon, in 1935, was a workers' party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party or Ceylon Equal Society Party (LSSP). The first Communist (Stalinist) Party on the island originated from a minority split in the LSSP in 1940. During the Second World War the LSSP itself split with a section of it – the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party – rallying to the Fourth International. Re-unification of the BSP and the LSSP in 1950 saw the latter become a section of the Fourth International.

The highpoint of its influence in the class struggle was its leadership of the great hartal (general strike) of 1953. However in the following years the LSSP degenerated, first into centrism, and finally into reformism. In 1964, it entered a bourgeois nationalist government. Various left splits from the LSSP, trying to rediscover revolutionary Trotskyism, continued to split away from the LSSP. One such a split in 1977 gave birth to the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) aligned with the British Militant Tendency, led by Ted Grant. This in turn saw a breakaway in 1982 to form a Sri Lankan section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (led by Ernest Mandel).

The NSSP organisation itself crossed class lines in the late 1980s when it supported the Indo-Lankan peace accord, which meant the deployment of Indian soldiers in Sri Lanka. A minority of the

NSSP split away and formed the Marxist Workers Tendency. After an abortive attempt at entrism in the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party they succeeded in launching a new organization, the United Socialist Party. This organisation was affiliated to the Committee for a Workers' International and indeed was one of its most successful sections in the semi colonial world. In 2005 they stood in the presidential elections and came third with 35,000 votes.

However the policy of the USP's general secretary, Siritunga Jayasuriya, led to a further split. With no proper democratic debate in the party he set about implementing a popular front policy with the

right wing United National Party. The UNP has no progressive role to play in the struggle for the Tamils rights or to end the war – only the workers movement can create a lasting piece in the

country by forcing the capitalists to recognise the rights of the Tamils, including national separation if they so wish. The CWI leadership sided with the current general secretary against the long-standing militants who had helped to build the CWI for over 20 years.

Many of the leading members, half the central committee and key leaders in the trade unions left the CWI to form a new organisation – the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka.

In the spirit of internationalism the comrades immediately began to seek out an international organization that could assist them in the difficult task of con-

structing a Trotskyist party in Sri Lanka. Coming from a country where the Fourth International once had a mass following, their political investigations took them to the League for the Fifth International. After several months' correspondence between the International Secretariat of the League and the leading committees of the SPSL, culminating with a visit by a representative of the League in May, a Declaration of Fraternal Relations was agreed which we print below.

The comrades of the SPSL are currently making a thorough political analysis of the centrist politics behind the CWI. In particular they were surprised about the depth of the adaptation to reformism that leading CWI members like Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe engaged in when they were part of the Labour Party in Britain.

The League will work with the SPSL leaders and members over the coming months to assist them in deepening their analysis of the centrist degeneration of the Fourth International. The development of our links with the Trotskyist movement in Sri Lanka and the connections that the SPSL has with sizeable working class forces (especially within the health workers union) opens the possibility for serious numbers of working class militants in Sri Lanka to be won to the call for a Fifth International.

Revolution, the independent youth movement in solidarity with the League also hopes to work with the young members of the SPSL to build a section of Revolution. Continued discussions if they lead to a fusion of our two organisations will allow the struggle for a Fifth International to take further important steps forward in South Asia, a region which will be a crucial battle ground in the struggle for socialism in the 21st century.

*International Secretariat of the League for a Fifth International, May 2007*

**The League will work with the SPSL leaders and members over the coming months to assist them in deepening their analysis of the centrist degeneration of the Fourth International**



# revolutionary unity

## Declaration of Fraternal Relations between the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka and the League for the Fifth International

**1** The world imperialist system is in a stage of globalisation. Barriers to capitalist exploitation are being torn down across the world. On every continent, the bourgeoisie is attacking the working class, seeking to privatise and break up the public sector and drastically to reduce social welfare. The US government and its allies are waging their “war on terror” against those that resist their domination, at home and abroad. They have occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, and the threat of war is used to force countries like Iran to submit to US dominance. The purpose is to prolong the “American Century” – i.e. US dominance of the semi-colonial world, the robbery of its natural resources and the exploitation of its workers and peasants. At the same time, rivalries between imperialist powers are re-emerging, with the EU, Japan and Russia all raising their military spending sharply.

**2** From 1991, the propagandists of capitalism claimed that a new epoch of global development and peace had opened with the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and the other bureaucratically degenerate workers’ states, and with the “opening up” to multinational capital of the countries of the “third world”. Yet within a decade this lie had been exploded by crisis and war (such as the “Asian crash”, the Balkan and Middle Eastern wars). Despite the present boom in the imperialist heartlands, and in countries like China and India, further global crises, even more destructive ones, are inevitable. Imperialism remains the final, declining stage of capitalism.

**3** Rapidly mass movements rose up to oppose “globalisation” and the “new imperialism”. Hundreds of thousands protested at the summits of

the handful of rich and powerful states, the G8, World Bank and the IMF. Millions worldwide demonstrated against the invasion of Iraq, opposition to the war has grown as the death toll rises. In Latin America, Africa and Asia movements of workers and peasants have mobilised to resist the takeover of their natural resources, the privatisation of their public utilities, the super-exploitation of their workforces.

**4** In Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan, resistance has mounted against invasion and occupation by the imperialists and their Zionist agents. We declare our solidarity with the struggles to expel the imperialist armies from the Middle East and call for the closing of all naval and airbases from which the imperialists seek to dominate the semi-colonial countries.

**5** In South Asia, a social crisis is mounting. In Pakistan a mass popular democratic movement is emerging to challenge the dictatorship of General Musharraf – the proletariat, organising independently of the bourgeois democratic forces, must come to the head of the movement to drive him from office. In Nepal the workers and urban masses have brought down the absolute monarchy of King Gyanendra, but still the monarchy remains and the bourgeois parties retain the power. In India the rapid growth of industry has expanded the working class – but in the government of West Bengal the workers’ party – the CPI(M) – has revealed again its completely bourgeois programme by attacking the workers and poor peasants and implementing neoliberal policies.

**6** In Sri Lanka the election of the new coalition government – with participation of the vicious Sinhalese chauvinists of the JVP – has opened a

new and dangerous phase of civil war. Inflation has massively increased; the government squanders what money it has on the military in its war against the Tamils. Civil liberties are stripped bare as the police clamp down on those who dissent against the government’s racist war. The fostering of Sinhalese chauvinism amongst workers and youth is the government’s conscious attempt to divert rage against poverty, lack of jobs, social decline towards the Tamil workers rather than towards the true cause of these ills: the bourgeoisie.

**7** The alternative to the nightmare of fratricidal national conflict is the formation of a revolutionary workers’ party in Sri Lanka. Such a party must defend the Tamil people’s right to self determination – up to and including the formation of a separate state if they so wish – and the right of the Tamil people to resist repression by the Sinhalese chauvinists and the government. It must strive to bring the working class to the head of the fight against national oppression, declaring in the words of Karl Marx that ‘a nation which oppresses another can never itself be free’.

**8** In this struggle, the working class must maintain its independence. We utterly reject the people’s front policy of forming a political bloc with democratic bourgeois parties, such as was proposed in 2006 by the United Socialist Party (Sri Lankan section of the Committee for a Workers International), an abandonment of class principle which led to the formation by the proletarian wing of the party of the new Socialist Party of Sri Lanka. This led to the General Secretary of the USP attempting to form an alliance with the bourgeois UNP and not first of all with the left. Only through class independence and a rejection of the people’s front policy can the



working class party link the fight against chauvinism and national oppression to the fight against capitalist exploitation and oppression of the workers and rural poor of the entire island. In this way the Socialist Party strives to unite working people from Tamil, Sinhalese and all ethnic and religious communities to break the power of the ruling class and their imperialist masters.

**9** We fight for an end to capitalism and for the working class to take power and to build a new society based on a democratically planned economy. We believe that only such working class power can fully and finally liberate all those who suffer exploitation and oppression, on the basis of gender, race, nationality or sexual orientation. We look to the Russian Revolution 90 years ago as the model for working class revolution. We adhere to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and use the method of Trotsky's transitional programme and the early Fourth International. The crowning point of our programme is the creation of soviets and an armed workers' militia and the struggle for the dictatorship of proletariat.

**10** It is our duty to warn the working class that the ruling classes of the world, imperialist and semi-colonial will never allow the working class to take power by exclusively peaceful means, by winning a majority in parliament, etc. They will resort to force long before that and the working class has to be prepared for this. Today political tendencies such as the Fourth International and the Committee for a Workers International – of which the SPSL was recently a part – are deliberately seeking to obscure this basic truth. Such equivocation is not Leninism or Trotskyism but centrism, which vacillates hopelessly between revolutionary words and reformist deeds.

**11** We cannot fight for socialism in Sri Lanka alone, nor in any isolated country. It is necessary for the world working class to build a new revolutionary International to fight for socialism across the world. The SPSL, after discussions with the League for the Fifth International, believes that it is advancing the clearest revolutionary method on which to build this new world party today. Therefore we call on all

political organisations that are fighting for the power of the working class and the overthrow of capitalism, all militant trade unions waging the class struggle, to join us in declaring for the formation of a Fifth International and in discussing the programmatic and organisational basis on which a new world party of social revolution can be built.

**12** We agree to establish fraternal relations between the SPSL and the League for the Fifth International with a view to deepening political and methodological understanding of its programme. To this end the SPSL will translate the League's programme *From Protest to Power* into Sinhalese and Tamil.

**13** We agree that the SPSL will discuss with the council of REVOLUTION – the international socialist youth movement which works in political solidarity with the League for the Fifth International – the possibility of building a section of REVOLUTION in Sri Lanka.

**14** The SPSL and the League will take forward this process of revolutionary unification: the International Executive Committee of the League will discuss with the SPSL how it can become a sympathising section of the League and ultimately be admitted as a full section at the League's next international congress. We will work in conjunction with other League supporters in South Asia to seek out co-thinkers in as many countries of the region as possible and hopefully to build sections there that will work in the closest solidarity.

- Down with imperialism's drive to super-exploitation and war
- Down with the Sri Lankan regime's chauvinist war of national oppression against the Tamil people
- Long live the struggle of the workers and poor peasants for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a socialist order
- Forward to a Socialist Federation of South Asia
- Forward to the formation of a Fifth International – a new World Party of Social Revolution!



# Sri Lanka: from civil war to permanent revolution

By Simon Hardy

The ongoing offensive by the Sri Lankan army against the bases of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), commonly known as the Tamil Tigers, indicates the determination of the present government to isolate and militarily defeat them.

A peace process initiated with Norwegian facilitators in September 2002 temporarily ended a conflict in which more than 65,000 people had already been killed. The agreement pledged both sides to seek "a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka". Clearly this was far from recognition of the Tamils right to self-determination.

Government-LTTE negotiations effectively stalled in April 2003 when the latter walked out. Yet the ceasefire lingered on till 2005 when the government began a series of co-ordinated attacks on Tamil Tiger strongholds and civilian areas. Since then another 5,000 deaths have been recorded.<sup>1</sup> In addition 200,000 people were turned into refugees and 600,000 are confined and denied their basic human needs.

Since early March this year the Cease Fire Agreement truly lies in tatters, with the army conducting aerial bombardments and invasions of the Tamil majority areas around Batticaloa, trying to recapture a LTTE occupied army base there. Recent splits within the LTTE and fighting between it and parts of the broader Tamil national movement, coupled with the damage caused to many Tamil fishing areas by the 2004 Tsunami disaster, have weakened resistance to army attacks. The government clearly senses an opportunity to break the mili-

tary deadlock and seriously degrade the operational capacities of the Tamil Tigers, thus forcing a new ceasefire on much more favourable grounds.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremnayake of the Sri Lanka Liberation Front (SLFP) head the current government in Colombo, which was elected in November 2005. They were elected promising a hard line against the LTTE, something they delivered when they escalated government attacks and provocations within a few months of the election.

## CAUSE OF THE CONFLICT

The ethnic divisions in Sri Lanka go back a long way. Sinhalese is an Indo-European language, related to the languages of Northern India and this majority (now 74 per cent) traces its descent to settlement from there in the 6th century BC. Tamil is a Dravidian language related to those spoken in the southern part of the sub-continent. The Tamil minority (now 18 per cent) settled in the north and east of the island in the 14th century AD though some argue there has been a Tamil presence for over 20,000 years. However the origins of national antagonism must be traced back to the British imperialists. They turned Ceylon into a giant plantation, exploiting the people there to grow tea for export. Using their invariable 'divide-and-rule' tactics they looked for a minority to grant privileges to in return for support for their domination and exploitation of the island. They employed some of the Tamil Hindu minority as their managers, ensuring that they had a better access to education and so on. This sparked divisions between them and the majority Buddhist, Sinhalese speaking population. When the British ended their direct rule of the country in 1948, they maintained a sizeable military presence in the



President Mahinda Rajapaksa

country via several bases.

The Tamils are concentrated mainly in the north and the east of the country, especially in cities like Jaffna, which is home to around one million Tamils. The majority religion in Sri Lanka, and the religion of the government ministers, is Buddhism. The Tamils are mainly Hindus. Within the Tamil community itself there are two distinct groups, the Tamils that have lived in the country for hundreds of years and the Tamils that were brought over from India by the British to work in the plantations, often as indentured labour. From amongst the northern Tamils the British developed a privileged middle class stratum, placed in government jobs, educated to a higher level and incorporated into the colonial state. This contradiction formed the basis for an anti-Tamil political atmosphere after the British pulled out.

The Sinhala voting majority returned parties that provoked Tamil protests against their discriminatory laws. When





Burnt out remains of the Jaffna library

the Tamils initially organised non-violent protests in the late 1950s against suppression of their language, Sinhala chauvinists responded with violent attacks on the Tamils in 1961, 1974, 1977 and 1979. In the early 1980s police-provoked pogroms were launched against Tamils living in the Sinhala dominated south. In 1981 an event which helped kindle a full scale Tamil uprising was the burning of the Jaffna library<sup>2</sup>. This was the great repository of Tamil culture in the island stretching back centuries. The vandalism destroyed over 95,000 rare manuscripts and books and was carried out by police and paramilitaries. These events proved to the Tamils that they could not rely on the country's constitutional system or "forces of order" to defend them. The minorities were excluded from government and the state allowed or even carried out systematic attacks on them.

The early resistance movements were rooted in the youth. Many students from middle class backgrounds, like Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE, were radicalised by what they went through in the 1970s. Their career aspirations in the civil service were thwarted through language restrictions, leading them to take part in sit-ins and demonstrations against the government. The violent attacks and persecution of their community drove them to favouring individual terrorist actions. One of Prabhakaran's first political acts was the assassination of the mayor of Jaffna in 1975, carried out by members of his organisation, then called the Tamil New Tigers.

The relationship between the militant Tamil community and the Sinhalese security forces reached boiling point in

1983 when thirteen policemen were killed by LTTE members in Jaffna. In response mobs of chauvinist Sinhalese rampaged through the streets of major cities, including Colombo, burning down Tamil shops and homes. Around 1,000 Tamils were killed and many refugees fled from the southern areas. This was seen as a cataclysmic national event for the Tamils, and helped generate serious recruitment for the separatist rebels.

### THE TAMIL TIGERS

The LTTE is certainly the main armed resistance movement of the Tamils commanding around 10,000 militants. It was established in 1972 and has been run by Velupillai Prabhakaran with an iron hand since then. Its political programme is the familiar petty bourgeois national liberation programme of many post-world war semi-colonial resistance movements. It aims at creating a separate state for the Tamil minority. The LTTE strategy was to carry out an "armed struggle", i.e. guerrilla warfare, in the areas of the country that were majority Tamil, called Eelam, the proposed name for a Tamil homeland. The LTTE sought support from international bourgeois institutions, hoping they would recognise and support their struggle.

The 1983 pogrom acted as a huge catalyst for recruitment to the LTTE. Many Tamils saw it as the only self-defence force available to them. However a number of other factors that year also helped consolidate more Tamils around the militant struggle of the separatists. First the government brought in a new law that forced all new MPs to swear allegiance to the united Sri Lankan state thus cutting off the "peaceful and democratic" avenue for solving the national question. This

forced many supporters of Tamil independence or autonomy within government service to quit. Second the 100,000 people made into refugees by the pogroms formed a huge Tamil Diaspora which in turn helped to generate sympathy for the Tigers' cause. This was rapidly translated into financial support and weaponry.

The LTTE began an all-out war against the Sinhalese majority government from July 1983 to 1987 which is called the First Eelam war. The initial conflict resulted in the LTTE being cornered in Jaffna and close to defeat before India intervened and called a halt to the fighting. As regional superpower, India had always been seen as a potential ally by many Tamils since it has a sizeable Tamil speaking section of the population which has historic ties to many of the Tamils living in Sri Lanka.

The UNP government in 1987 was obliged to sign a pact with the Indian government called the Indo-Lanka Accord, which promised to grant limited autonomy to the Tamils and place Indian troops in many of the insurgent controlled areas. The LTTE initially supported the Accord, but turned against it when the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) began to forcibly disarm its fighters without any of the political promises being fulfilled. Before long the Tamil Tigers were fighting a war against the Indian forces: one which forced the IPKF to withdraw in 1990, leaving the Tamils not one step closer to their dream of an independent Eelam.

Revolutionary Socialists do not believe that the LTTE is the kind of leadership that the Tamils need to secure a progressive new society. Their history of violent attacks on other Tamil organisations, the dictatorial regime they run in the areas they control, the self-destructive tactics they use against Sinhala civilians, the use of child soldiers, are all means of struggle which do not help but hinder the cause of national liberation and self-determination. Such methods are evidence of the reactionary nature of much of the LTTE programme and political outlook. Their continued use of individual terror (assassination, suicide bombs in civilian areas) as a political tool has led to increasingly savage responses from the Sri Lankan government which has caused yet more suffering for the Tamils across the country. They have also failed to address many of the social needs of the



Tamils and other people living in their areas of control. Above all the LTTE's refusal to allow any opposition to exist or compete with them politically blocks the road to developing a better strategy and a better leadership – especially a working class party with a strategy of social revolution. Nevertheless whilst they represent the national resistance of the majority of the Tamil people it is the duty of revolutionary communists to do all in their power to assist the defeat of the government repression directed against them. A defeat of a government carrying on a reactionary war is in the interests of the workers and rural poor of all communities, including the Sinhalese. As Marx said, "a nation which oppresses another can never itself be free". The waste of vast sums money and human lives on the war when there is so much poverty in the country, the restrictions on democratic rights and state repression within the Sinhala community too, are all testimony to this fact.

In areas that the LTTE control they used the auspices of the Cease Fire Agreement to establish themselves as a quasi-state formation. The agreement committed the government to respect the existing front lines; this left large rural areas under the control of the Tamil Tigers. They set up administrative organs in order to develop and maintain control over the civilian population, judicial courts, a police force and even banks and limited taxation. In many of the areas however the central Sri Lankan government was still operating, so the LTTE fused its political officers with these institutions and forced them to work under their joint command.

In March 2004 Colonel Karuna, a prominent Tamil Tiger leader, split from the LTTE amid allegations of fraud and personal corruption. His split took most of the Eastern units with him, thus seriously weakening the LTTE's combat capabilities. It also threw the Sri Lankan government a lifeline to begin the process of breaking up the monopoly of control that the LTTE had established in the Eelam area. Karuna now works for the government, providing them with information which has led to the abduction of several leading Tamil cadres over the last few months. His organisation is also fighting an armed struggle against the LTTE which is sowing further divisions in the region and weakening the LTTE military might. This, combined

with the government's military offensive and a reduction of funding for the LTTE from abroad has led to successes of the military in retaking several bases that had been previously lost to the Tigers.

But no one should be fooled that a defeat of the LTTE would lead to peace in the region. It would lead to a police state over the Tamils who would be deprived of their national rights. That is why the peace process, as in Ireland, is a charade that the left should have nothing to do with. It is simply the mechanism through which the bourgeois and petty bourgeois leaders of the conflicting forces will try to manoeuvre each other into a corner. This results in the demobilisation of the struggle from the militant and subjectively revolutionary methods that were previously used to the dead end of parliamentary negotiations and international community brokered deals. It led to massive defeats for the Palestinians and if pursued it will lead to the same for the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The Tamil question cannot be resolved unless the rights of the Tamils are recognised unconditionally. Socialists support their right to self-determination, up to and including the creation of a separate state if the Tamils freely express this wish. Yet we do not seek separation or the division of existing states as some sort of good in itself. We are not bourgeois or petty bourgeois nationalists who believe every nation or nationality must have "their own" state, because even the most independent bourgeois states is no fatherland for the working class. "The working class has no country". Indeed, all other things being equal, large states, multinational and multi-ethnic are more desirable, providing that there is no element of forced unity. Why? Because they enable greater unity of the working class, across ethnic and racial divisions and a bigger arena in which to fight their exploiters and oppressors. The smaller the semi-colonial states, the more imperialism will seek to pit them against one another, dominate and exploit them. Hence we advocate voluntary socialist federation of states where workers have taken power. Marxists have held this view since Marx himself argued that the British workers must support the independence of Ireland while adding, "though after that may come federation".

The present oppression of the Tamils and the constant attacks on their rights indicate the contempt with which the

government in Colombo holds them. The Sri Lankan ruling class counterposes its own nationalist interests to the national rights and strivings of the Tamils. Their main parties view federal structures or regional autonomy in contempt, only juggling with the terms in order to politically deceive and disarm the Tamils with words that are never followed by deeds. They face generations of further oppression as the army attempts to crush the independence movement and drown the hopes of Tamil Eelam in blood. Socialists must resist this move by the government and work to force the democratic wishes of the oppressed Tamil nation to be granted in full. Whoever denies this is not even a democrat let alone a socialist.

## SINHALESE NATIONALISM

The Sinhalese bourgeoisie used the political vacuum left open by the British withdrawal to develop a strong nationalist ideology to tie the poor and middle classes to a struggle for a Sinhala dominated country. This political movement also encouraged a hatred of the Tamil minority who had often been seen as the satraps of the ruling British in the country.

A coherent national Ceylonese identity began to emerge though a political protest against the colonial occupation, the Suriya Mal campaign in the 1920's and 30's, when Ceylonese people protested against the exorbitant sums of money leaving the country to pay for Poppies on Armistice day. Another important event was the Malaria epidemic of 1934 in which over 100,000 people died. The British administration appeared to care little and did very little to deal with the situation. The Youth Leagues put the death toll to the 'direct result of the callousness and indifference of the state.'

These events, alongside strikes and working class actions up to 1935, led to the formation of an explicitly socialist party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP). The new party was designed as a broad organisation that could unite both the socialist minded workers and intellectuals with the radical nationalists in the middle classes. Ceylon lacked a strong national bourgeoisie, so its national liberation struggle was co-ordinated and led by subjectively socialist militants. The LSSP rallied to Trotskyism and joined the Fourth International.

Under its influence from the 1930's onwards the struggle for national libera-



tion took on a general anti capitalist colouring. The LSSP accepted and defended the national rights of the Tamils. It became the party of the majority of the class-conscious workers. Yet in 1964, in an act of historic betrayal, it voted to support entry into the bourgeois government (see below).

The forging of a bourgeois Sinhala nationalist identity took on a particular zeal after 1948, and was legislatively reinforced and extended by successive governments, passing laws that institutionalised the domination of the Sinhala majority. For instance in 1948 the UNP administration passed a law that deprived around one million Tamils of citizenship rights, thus also upsetting the delicate balance of the post independence constitutional framework.

The major Sinhalese bourgeois parties – the UNP, SLFP and the JVP – are also arch opponents of any just solution for the oppressed Tamils..

The UNP was the major post independence bourgeois party and the first to form a government. It appealed to Sinhala majority and sections of the land owning classes; however it supported Ceylon remaining a Dominion of Britain whilst advocating pro-business policies to enrich the nascent bourgeoisie.

A split from it in 1951 formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, led by Solomon Bandaranaike who favoured a more vigorous approach to undermining the position of the Tamil minority. Shortly after taking power in the 1956 elections, the SLFP passed the notorious 'Sinhala Only Act', which made it the only official language of Ceylon. The SLFP has been the main trap for left wing parties as its populist nature and appeals for 'socialism' have blinded many would be revolutionaries into joining its governments; this is the fate that befell the LSSP after 1964.

At the last elections on 2 April 2004, the SLFP was part of the United People's Freedom Alliance that won 45.6% of the popular vote and 105 out of the 225 seats in Parliament. The JVP was the largest partner in this alliance after the UNP and thus it became part of the government.

The JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) originated as an underground Maoist guerrilla movement, which launched an armed rebellion in 1971. It always had a strong streak of Sinhala nationalism which has increased in virulence over the decades. Its anti-imperialist rhetoric gave way to a pro-

parliamentary orientation, culminating in their election to a popular front government in the mid 1990's and their violent dismissal of any discussions between the government in Colombo and the LTTE. During the ceasefire they called on the USA to throw its full weight behind the 'war on terror' against the Tamil Tigers in the North and East of the country. The JVP is a reactionary chauvinist party for all its continued talk about socialism and communism (perversely its website still has a hammer and sickle on its home page).

Socialists must be clear on the reactionary nature of Sinhalese chauvinism and nationalism. It is an ideological tool of the ruling class in Sri Lanka to bind sections of the working class and poor to its political project of a unitary state. In order to subordinate both the ethnic/linguistic and the religious minorities of the country the continued domination of Buddhism and Sinhalese as the religious and linguistic official norms of Sri Lankan society to the exclusion of everything else leave no room for compromise. The logical conclusion of this political methodology is the crushing of social, religious or political movements that challenge the status quo.

### THE TRAGEDY AND TREACHERY OF THE LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY

The tragedy of Sri Lankan political history is the tendency for previously revolutionary parties to be co-opted into the reformist parameters of the Sinhalese ruling class and end up as mouthpieces for the reactionary forces in society. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party, the LSSP, which was previously the mass section of the Fourth International and the group that split away from it, the NSSP, have ended up as reformist parties who are part of the government.

As Workers Power wrote in its 1983 book *Death Agony of the Fourth International*:

"Throughout the 1950s the practice of the LSSP was increasingly limited to elections and trade unionism, not revolutionary agitation. In 1960 when the SLFP of the Bandaranaike family gained the largest number of seats and the LSSP lost two of their previous 12 seats, the "Marxist" leaders, Leslie Goonewardene, Colin de Silva and Bernard Soyaa were thrown into crisis. In 1956 they had

given the bourgeois SLFP (which had enjoyed widespread support amongst the peasants, whom the LSSP had largely ignored) "responsive co-operation" when it was in government.

In 1960 they opted to give the new Bandaranaike government "critical support". Here again, as in Bolivia, an FI section went beyond the defence of a government, which was carrying out democratic or anti-imperialist measures against domestic or imperialist reaction, to political support for that government (albeit with "criticisms"). Only in 1961 did the International Secretariat of the Fourth International (IS) and its World Congress call for a radical change in the political course being carried out by the LSSP, after the LSSP had already voted for the SLFP's budget in 1960. Such criticism was too little, too late. The failure of the IS and (after 1963) the United Secretariat of the Fourth International to support the building of a fraction of the left in the LSSP, paved the way for the later treachery."

The later treachery was that the critical support evolved into a "popular front" approach to the SLFP which resulted in the LSSP leader N M Perera becoming the finance minister of a bourgeois government. The 1964 conference of the LSSP voted to support this move and resulted in the LSSP degenerating from Trotskyism to reformism.

To share government with a Sinhala chauvinist party, the SLFP, meant of course abandoning the defence of the rights of the Tamils. Likewise its parliamentarism meant that in the late 1960s it lost the support of the revolutionary students and youth from the Sinhala community too, opening the way to the Maoists.

Though the party flourished in various coalitions in the 1960s and early 70s, with cabinet ministers, and control over powerful trade unions, it degenerated politically, espousing a reformist, indeed openly "Eurocommunist" approach. Yet in 1977 the LSSP lost all their parliamentary seats and in 1982 the UNP Government provoked a railway strike, which turned into a general strike. The government mobilisation of strikebreakers and police repression smashed the strike and broke the trade unions. This was a historic defeat. The LSSP effectively lost its mass base. Since then there have been several much smaller Trotskyist groups and parties which we



do not have the space here to analyse in full but to which we will return in further articles.

## PERMANENT REVOLUTION

Socialists recognise that a capitalist Tamil state is no guarantee of a dramatic improvement in the living conditions of the majority of the poverty stricken workers and peasants that will live within its borders. The struggle of the ANC in South Africa shows that nationalist resistance movements do not automatically create more socially just and egalitarian societies. The ANC secured the right of black bourgeois figures to lead the country, and they proved unable to improve the lives of the exploited millions.

Socialists therefore must advance a programme of revolutionary measures that will not only allow the national aspirations of the Tamils to be fulfilled but also create the conditions for a revolutionary new form of society that can meet the needs of the working class and poor across the island.

However the narrow political aspirations of the LTTE also undermine their ability to rally significant support to their cause. They not only preach a form of Hindu chauvinism as a counter weight to the ruling parties' Sinhalese chauvinism, they also alienate the majority of the island. Most working class Sinhalese receive no real benefit from the continued political hegemony of their religious and ethnic grouping; they can be won from the Sinhalese chauvinists to a united revolutionary party that addresses their needs. The overarching slogan for revolutionaries in Sri Lanka should be for a socialist federation of the whole region, which would provide not only the economic basis for emancipation of the urban poor and working class but also the only framework for really answering the needs of the nationally oppressed.

Socialists must make clear that only a working class leadership of the Tamils which seeks to win over workers from the Sinhalese speaking majority can provide an answer. Their programme should include demands for full nationalisation of the major industries and agribusinesses under workers control, with no compensation for the bosses.

The pinnacle of our programme is the call for the creation of workers' councils in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations when the rising level of mass



Dr. Wickramabahu Karunaratna, the leader of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), leading a section of the demonstrating workers in downtown Colombo.

struggles requires coordination and when the crisis of leadership in the trade unions and parties with influence in the working class urgently needs to be overcome. Democratic debate over tactics and strategy, and unity in action: these enable the rapid change and development necessary in heightened periods of class struggle. Workers councils allow for just this. Indeed workers often spontaneously create such forms of organisation during the course of struggle. But there is one other vital element – a force that has worked out a revolutionary strategy, has trained and prepared leaders who can offer an alternative at the crucial moment, who will strive for the workers' councils to seize the power. In short a revolutionary party. The role of the revolutionary party is to know when the class antagonisms reach the point when only a revolutionary seizure of power by the working class can resolve the crisis in favour of the working class.

But soviet type bodies do not spring fully formed from nowhere. Local delegate-based committees to organise resistance to military, police and JVP repression, to support workers struggles against the government programme of privatisations and attacks on the working and living conditions of the poor and working class – such bodies could be established now. United across the whole island they alone could co-ordinate a serious fightback against the state and the employers. The struggle for working class power, for a socialist federation in Sri Lanka and the entire region, will only go

forward when a powerful revolutionary organisation is built which can combine both principled support for the Tamils' right to self determination with a united revolutionary class struggle against imperialism, against the Sri Lankan capitalists and their government. To this task the League for the Fifth International and its sympathisers in Sri Lanka should dedicate themselves in the years ahead.

- 1Sri Lankan troops out of Tamil areas
- 1Solidarity with the LTTE and all Tamil forces resisting government attacks
- 1Self-determination for the Tamils, up to and including the right to form an independent state
- 1United Nations out of Sri Lanka, all aid to the Tamil regions to be channelled through working class and Tamil organisations
- 1For the right of all refugees to return home
- 1Nationalisation of major companies and industries under workers control
- 1Independent trade unions in Sri Lanka, for a new revolutionary party for all workers and socialist youth in Sri Lanka
- 1For workers' revolution and a government of workers and poor peasants
- 1For a socialist federation of Sri Lanka as part of a Socialist Federation of South Asia!

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup><http://theacademic.org/>

<sup>2</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burning\\_of\\_Jaffna\\_library](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burning_of_Jaffna_library)

Burning\_of\_Jaffna\_library



# Whatever happened to the anticapitalist movement?

During the past decade there have been huge mobilisations on the streets against the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the G8. The left, social movements and NGOs have also come together in great forums of tens of thousands of people. In recent years, a debate has opened up about why these forums and summits have not set out to organise militant resistance to globalisation. **Dave Stockton** analyses the obstacles to further co-ordination in the movement and how they can be overcome, while, on page 34, **Luke Cooper** looks at the influence of post-modernism

*“After the disappointment that was Nairobi, many long-standing participants in the [World Social] Forum are asking themselves: Is the WSF still the most appropriate vehicle for the new stage in the struggle of the global justice and peace movement? Or, having fulfilled its historic function of aggregating and linking the diverse counter-movements spawned by global capitalism, is it time for the WSF to fold up its tent and give way to new modes of global organisation of resistance and transformation?”* The Forum at the Crossroads, Walden Bello, May 4, 2007

The World and European Social Forums have become well known as huge international gatherings of thousands of social movements, trade unions and the left. However, these bodies were always more than simply big events with speeches by well-known journalists and academics. They came to form a central part of a new radical movement that emerged towards the end of the 20th century. By besieging the summits of the rich and powerful and later leading millions on to the streets to oppose the Iraq war, this movement has had a profound impact on 21st century politics.

Undoubtedly the rise of this new political force offered the opportunity to reinvigorate the far left. A new generation without illusions in Stalinism and social democracy could have been won to the programme of revolutionary Marxism. But this would be no automatic process - it would be a struggle. The new movement did not exist in a vacuum but brought together in antagonistic unity a range of political forces with distinct programmes, from new social democratic reformism, to various mutated brands of Stalinism, not to mention anarchism and environmentalism.

A conflict quickly emerged even over what the movement should be called. This was a clear expression of struggle over its

political programme, i.e. over what it stood for. As we said in 2003:

“A movement without a name? Its left wing - young fighters on the streets at the summit sieges of Seattle or Genoa - call it anticapitalist. Its right wing - the speakers in the vast tents of its Social Forums at Porto Alegre, Mumbai, Florence, Paris and now London, call it altermondialiste. Or, if you want something that sounds safe... you can call it the Global Justice Movement. Whatever you call the ‘movement of movements’ it is suffering from an identity crisis... Speaking frankly it does not know where it is going. Does it want to ‘fix or nix’ the international financial institutions? Does it want to abolish capitalism or create a ‘fair and equal’ market? Does it want to take power from the hands of the warmongers? Or is any talk about ‘taking power’ just too twentieth century, too passé for words?”

What does the movement stand for today? Has this political struggle over its politics come to any conclusion? These are pertinent questions, precisely because today many leading activists speak of a crisis. In the quote above, Walden Bello - a respected voice on the movement's left wing - dares to ask the question, has the World Social Forum played out its historic role, is it now time to move on? Such talk from a leading activist in the social movement would have been unheard of just a few years ago. Indeed, Bello points to a real problem: both the World Social Forum and the European Social Forum are in a state of organisational and political paralysis and both have been postponed for two years.

A starting point for analysing the reasons for this paralysis is recognising that two trends have emerged within the movement. On the one hand are those who want an organised movement that coordinates and mobilises action against neoliberal globalisation, environmental



catastrophe and imperialist war. On the other side are those who are determined to stop this happening, who hold sacrosanct the idea that the forums are just an "open space". The bad news is that the second camp – the forces of paralysis – are winning: the "movement" is not moving.

To talk, however, simply of those who are in favour of a movement and those who are in favour of a space, is to partly accept the terminology and analysis made by those who want the WSF to remain a so-called "space". This is because, for all the libertarian and postmodernist jargon they use to advance their position, they have not developed a new theory or strategy but are old fashioned reformist ideologues – people who represent real reformist forces in the working class. These outright bureaucrats have, ironically, been able to play on the non-hierarchical, anti-political, "horizontalist" prejudices stemming from the initially powerful influence of anarchism and populism in the early days of the anticapitalist movement.

This article surveys the crisis in the social movements and shows concretely how the reformist politics of the leadership have led to real defeats and missed opportunities for the working class and social movements. This does not at all mean that there have not been great struggles. In the last year alone there have been many challenges to those in the corridors of power. From the mass struggles of youth in France, Greece and Chile, to the mass democratic revolutionary movements in Nepal and Pakistan, to the revolutionary crises of Mexico and Bolivia, and of course the crisis engulfing imperial armies in the Middle East, world politics has hardly lacked great struggles and crises.

This is not an exhaustive list and many other countries have experienced social and political crises. However, in response to these struggles the general trend of the leadership of the social movements has been to move rightwards. Some of the key forces – such as the Workers Party of Lula in Brazil (Partido dos Trabalhadores - PT) and now Rifondazione Comunista in Italy – are in coalition government with neoliberal forces or hope to be in the future. The contention of this article is that the crisis in the social movements has its foundation in this tension: how can you fight the capitalists and neoliberals if you are in government with them or plan to be so in the future?

In demonstrating this thesis, four areas are examined:



Anti-WTO protestors

- The history of the emergence of the anticapitalist movement and the social forums;
- The theory and strategy of the reformist leaderships in the social movements;
- The emergence of the crisis in the social movements;
- The relationship of these developments to the world political situation.

By analysing these areas the article will explain how the present crisis came about and point to the dangers and opportunities that lie ahead. In doing so we hope to set out a course that can take the workers and youth out of this state of affairs. This is no easy task and raises major strategic questions: what is to be done to prevent the movement against imperialist globalisation sinking ever deeper into a morass of self-congratulatory 'diversity'? How can a coherent force emerge from it that can challenge imperialism and capitalism? Does this inevitably mean a complete break from all those holding it back? In answering these questions we hope to outline how revolutionary Marxists can take forward the fight for a new world party of social revolution – a fifth International.

## THE ANTICAPITALIST MOVEMENT

Bernard Cassen, a leading theorist of Attac France, entitled his 2003 book on the movement, *Everything Began in Porto Alegre*; a thousand social forums.<sup>2</sup> Leaving aside the impertinence of claiming that "everything" began in Porto Alegre (the Brazilian city that hosted the first social forum) what Cassen is implying is that it gave birth to the movement. This may be

true for his personal participation, but the history of the new anticapitalist movement stretches back to the mid 1990s at least.

It arose as a response to the "triumphalist" phase of neoliberalism and globalisation of the early 1990s. In these years the message of the capitalist media worldwide was "we won the Cold War" and "there is no alternative to free market capitalism." Poor farmers and sweatshop workers in the global south and trade unionists in the global north were told by their own governments: your rights, protections and welfare are all fundamentally secondary to the needs of business and enterprise.

They argued workers must give up their desire for permanent employment, rising wages, social security, pensions, education and healthcare. Instead workers must compete against one another – offering ever lower wages, longer hours and ever more minimal social overheads – to satisfy the corporate giants. Fear not, claimed the bosses, our super profits will eventually "trickle down" to you. If at first it seems everything is lost, workers can console themselves with the thought that "there's no gain without pain." The official labour movement, social democratic and communist parties and the trade unions tended to accept the inevitability of globalisation and began to slim down social provision, turning it into a "safety net" rather than a system for promoting equality.

What was remarkable and inspiring about the anticapitalist movement was that in less than five years from the downfall of the Soviet Union, young people and



militant sections of peasants and workers began to fight back and coordinated their actions on an international scale. This was made much easier by the developments in technology that were giving birth to the internet and new media.

An initial focus for crystallising the new movement was the 1994 "uprising" of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or EZLN). Though the EZLN uprising was a military failure, the declaration of war they issued against neoliberalism and the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) was an astounding success. So much so, the Mexican army was unable to bloodily crush them, due to the focus of the world on out-of-the-way, poverty stricken Chiapas. By using the internet the Zapatista message spread like wildfire.

They drew the world's attention to huge discrepancies of wealth between the "northern globalisers" and their accomplices in the southern elites on the one hand and the indigenous communities and peasants, not only of Chiapas but in vast areas of the world, on the other. In 1996, the Zapatista movement organized the first "Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism", which drew activists from North America and Europe as well as Latin America. Out of this grew People's Global Action, a semi-anarchist, populist and ecologist network that influenced the early phase of the movement.

At the same time many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and environmentalist campaigns launched an international campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investments in 1998 and against the free trade agenda of the World Trade Organization. NGOs and charities linked to the churches launched the campaign Jubilee 2000 to highlight the terrible debt burden of countries in the Global South. In addition, sections of the trade union movement, especially in the United States, became alarmed at globalisation and began to organise protests. Some demanded protectionist measures, while others sought links with unions in the global south as a better way of defending jobs and conditions by creating a force able to stand up to giant multinational corporations.

These three currents flowed together, leading to the famous demonstration at the World Trade Organisation's

## THE RISE OF THE ANTICAPITALIST MOVEMENT 2000-2001

### 2000

- 1Jan: 2000 Cochabamba, Bolivia protests against water privatisation and price rises.
- 1Jan 29 demonstration in Davos and Zurich against the World Economic Forum
- 1Apr 16: Washington DC, USA, anti-IMF protests
- 1Sep 11: Melbourne, Australia, anti-World Economic Forum demonstration
- 1Sep 24-26: Prague, Czech Republic, protests against the World Bank/IMF
- 1Oct 10: Seoul-S. Korea – protests against ASEAN Summit
- 1Nov 20: Montreal, Canada protests against, G20 meeting
- 1Dec 6-7: Nice, France, separate ETUC and anticapitalist protests against European Union Summit

### 2001

- 1Jan 20: Washington, DC, USA protest against Bush inauguration
- 1Jan 27: Davos, Switzerland, protests against World Economic Forum.
- 1Mar 12: Mexico City Zapatista "caravan" greeted by mass demonstration
- 1Apr 19-21: Quebec City, Canada, Summit of the Americas (FTAA) 40,000 to 60,000 besiege the Free Trade Area of the Americas Summit.
- 1May 1: Anticapitalist demonstrations world wide;
- 1June 15: Gothenburg, Sweden European Union Summit, large-scale street fighting three protesters shot.
- 1July 20: Genoa, Italy G8 Summit, 200,000 besiege the "red zone" Carlo Giuliani shot dead. Strikes across Italy in the following week. Mushrooming of local social forums.
- 19/11 attacks on Pentagon in Washington and World Trade Centre New York City
- 1Sep 29: Washington, DC, protests against threat of war against Afghanistan

Ministerial Conference in Seattle in 1999. Despite the leadership of the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) demonstrating separately from the radical direct action forces, a section of workers marched to join the direct action protesters who were under heavy attack from the police. This act of solidarity was popularly described as 'when the teamsters joined the turtles'. This act of solidarity demonstrated not only the common interests workers had with youth to fight-back, but also the great potential of the anticapitalist movement to radicalise the working class.

Throughout this period, the current associated with this journal argued that the anticapitalist movement must orientate to the working class and its struggles, while the working class unions and parties needed to be won to anticapitalist ideas and involvement in direct action – including using solidarity strike action in support of the movement's objectives. In short, as we put it: "bring anticapitalism to the working class – bring the working class to anticapitalism." And indeed in the semi-colonial world, especially in countries like Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Argentina, the mass struggles underway in 2000-3 increasingly fused workers, peasants and unemployed in popular assemblies.

These struggles were provoked by foreign debt, the IMF's structural adjustment programmes, neoliberal privatisation offensives and the Argentine economic crisis of 2000.

There was a clear objective basis to the need for an international movement and coordination. In the imperialist heartlands and the semi-colonies the same neoliberal attacks were being launched against workers (e.g. in the EU's Lisbon Agenda of 2000). The need to struggle across borders, against international capital that now knew no borders, was a felt need of the international working class – one that endures eight years on from Seattle.

The success of Seattle in helping to close down the WTO caught the imagination of youth and radical rank and file workers worldwide. There was no summit where the rich and powerful could convene meetings without opposition and disruption. In the Prague protests against the IMF in 2000 our slogan "Turn Prague into Seattle" was taken up by activists – a powerful example of the new internationalism of this period. It had echoes of the late 1960s youth radicalisation against the Vietnam War.

These protests were filled with excitement and radicalism. They taught a whole new generation to hate capitalism and its destructive effects. Hundreds of



thousands of people worldwide learnt a new vocabulary; against "structural adjustment", "third world debt", "free trade", "neoliberalism", "précarité" and "privatisation." The media was obliged to register "the new internationalism" that challenged globalisation not from a narrow nationalist position but from a profound feeling of solidarity with one another's struggles. In short, rampant capitalism ran into a powerful obstacle that repeatedly hampered the trade rounds and reforms dictated by the USA and the EU within the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and limited and frustrated attacks on public services. The chosen method for fighting this was direct action, however symbolic, and alliances between many hitherto different single-issue campaigns.

Writers like Susan George, Naomi Klein, Walden Bello, Michael Albert, Kevin Danaher, Martin Khor, Eric Toussaint, Samir Amin, Vandana Shiva, Noam Chomsky, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri poured out a flood of books and articles which, despite their differences with one another, created a new radical populist ideology which was biting and effective in its description of the ills of corporate globalisation – but usually reformist or utopian in the solutions they suggested.

Popular slogans of this early phase were "one no and many yeses", and "in our diversity is our strength." This certainly embodied a powerful desire to combine the maximum forces against the common enemy and to recognise the hitherto excluded (indigenous peoples and the so-called "underclass"). However, it also bore witness to a profound wariness about what sort of alternative world was possible.

Many of these ideologists consciously rejected Marxism, socialism and communism as supposedly failed utopias of the 20th century – typically pointing to the experience of Stalinist tyranny and bureaucratic planning in the Soviet Union and wrongly equating this with Marxism and indeed with the struggle for power per se. Many were also influenced by the postmodern philosophy that developed in the universities when the radical youth movements and New Left of the 1960s suffered defeats and setbacks.

The disillusioned intellectuals of this period argued that modernist emancipatory "grand narratives" – the various "isms" – had failed, only imposing totalising and authoritarian ideas, and were

ultimately based on an exaggerated view of the human capacity to uncover objective truth about the world through rational empirical investigation and theory. For philosophers like Foucault and Lyotard<sup>3</sup> this created a problem for radical political strategy that they were never able to answer – how to change the world without imposing a new reactionary order?<sup>4</sup>

Foucault in his essay 'useless to revolt' went as far as to ponder whether it was correct to revolt or not and concluded that this was a non-question, because 'people do revolt; that is a fact.'<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the theorizing away of political strategy is the logical conclusion that much post-modern thinking comes to. This arises, from a mistaken analysis of how power and domination function in modern societies – they do not do so because of a wrong set of ideas, but from material social relations.

In the anticapitalist movement, activists influenced by postmodern thought tended to link their ideas to libertarianism. This was reflected in a focus on "horizontal" forms of organisation, "consensus decision making" in place of formal democratic structures and an aversion to a unified method and strategy. There was also a tendency to want the movement to move beyond or exist outside of politics – 'civil society' was emphasised over and above political parties.

More classical social liberal ideas were also present. In the early period of summit sieges the protests were often accompanied by counter-conferences. These were usually organised by NGOs and Attac,<sup>6</sup> the campaign for a tax on financial transactions, and were usually counter-posed to the protests and indeed underpinned by a different set of ideas. For these more mainstream forces, protest and direct action were secondary or even unimportant. Instead, it was necessary to hold conferences to change world "public opinion" over time. Then, via the normal operation of bourgeois democracy, neoliberalism would be displaced by a new social reformism.

There was clearly a real need to debate these questions out; to come to some conclusions as to how to achieve lasting social and political change. Ironically, given the prevalence of "post-political" ideas, this process really expressed a need to discuss political strategy. The development of the social forums marked a real maturing of the anticapitalist movement in this sense. The huge conferences with

workshops, joint-seminars and large seminars, gave a huge opportunity to discuss how to make "another world possible."

## THE TURN TO SOCIAL FORUMS

The initiative for a World Social Forum goes back a meeting in February 2000 between major Brazilian Non-Governmental Organisations and French academics-cum-journalists around the prestigious French journal *Le Monde Diplomatique* and *Attac*. The former were represented by Oded Grajew, coordinator of the Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship, and Francisco (Chico) Whitaker of the Catholic-inspired Brazilian Commission for Justice and Peace; the latter by Bernard Cassen, chair of *Attac*, and Ignacio Ramonet, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

They agreed to hold a global gathering of social movements, to be called the World Social Forum, held at the same time as the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. It was planned to take place the following year, in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. It should be noted that for the organisers this was a conscious move away from the idea of summit sieges – away from militant clashes with the state forces guarding the rich and powerful, to discussion of alternative policies to neoliberalism. Earlier attempts to run counter summits alongside the direct action mobilisations had not been a happy experience for the organisers, since the latter drew all the media attention and most of the crowds.

However, the social forums differed from the narrowly focused NGO-sponsored counter-conferences at the summit protests. They were much broader in their conception, purporting to be open to the many organisations, networks and movements who had over several years been confronting globalisation.

From the outset, however, the forums had very clearly defined limits. After the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2001, the committee of Brazilian organisations that organised it drafted a Charter of Principles that outlined a set of rules governing the forum and future 'editions', i.e. regional or local variations, of the concept.<sup>7</sup> The charter banned the open participation of political parties in the World Social Forum (WSF), committed the forum to a consensus decision making model and insisted the WSF was

**Popular slogans of this early phase were "one no and many yeses" and "in our diversity is our strength."**



not a "locus of power" i.e. no participants could speak for it or in its name and there was no leadership of the WSF. They argued the WSF did not claim to represent civil society, it only provided a "space" for it.

### THE OPEN SPACE: AN ALIBI FOR PARALYSIS

Chico Whitaker, a key leader and theorist of the WSF and a member of the Brazilian Workers Party, has sought to theorise the "space not a movement"

approach which is enshrined as law in the Porto Alegre principles. He attempts to create a mystique of it, arguing that "Something new was born in Porto Alegre. It was a true Agora of worldwide democracy, with all the murmuring and confusion of such a gigantic event. The atmosphere invited us to dream of another world that is possible, timely and necessary."

Juggling with the classical terms for a market place – a forum or agora – does not provide any alibi for blocking the tak-

ing of decisions there any more than it did in ancient Athens or Rome (in the classical world it was where the citizens' assembly met and made decisions).

In the same piece, Whitaker goes on to defend the undemocratic manner in which the principles were drafted, legitimising this with reference to the "space not a movement" method. He argued, "the Forum is not deliberative in nature and time will not be wasted in discussing the commas in a final document." The democratic niceties of discussion fol-

# The summits

#### WSF 2001

The first World Social Forum took place, in Porto Alegre, Brazil from 25-30 January. Some 15-20,000 people attended:

#### WSF 2002

The second WSF also took place in Porto Alegre from January 31 to February 5. The number attending was more than 50,000, with 12,274 delegates present representing 123 countries. The same thematic areas as at the first Forum were covered in 27 conferences, 96 seminars and 622 self-managed activities (i.e., seminars and workshops organised by groups participating in the WSF).

#### WSF 2003

The third WSF took place in Porto Alegre from January 23 to 28, and this time drew close to 100,000 participants from all over the world. Some 20,000 delegates, from a total of 123 countries took part. Their numbers were swelled by the participants in the Youth Camp (around 25,000). In 2003, officially organised activities included 10 conferences, 22 testimonies, 4 round tables (for dialogue and controversy including between parties and the social movements) and 36 panel debates. 1,300 of self-managed activities (seminars and workshops) took place.

#### WSF 2004

Held in Mumbai (Bombay) India; over the six days of the forum over 100,000 people gathered from 152 countries attending over 1,200 plenaries and seminars on the themes: The two traditional communist parties (CPI and CPI-M) were openly present at the World Social Forum bringing their mass organizations (trade unions, youth and women's groups). Large numbers of urban and rural poor, Dalits

("untouchables"), tribal peoples and many women's organisations took part. In addition there was a smaller event Mumbai Resistance dominated by the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).

#### WSF 2005

In January 2005 the 5th World Social Forum brought over 155,000 people together for four days, with over 2,000 workshops, an opening day march with 200,000 participants, and representatives from over 100 countries. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez spoke in the Gigantinho stadium saying "Only with socialism can we transcend capitalism." He also warned that, "Many talks were occurring (at the WSF) without conclusions. We are not here to waste our time. We must urgently build a new socialist movement."

And at the end of the week, a group of nineteen writers and members of the International Council released a twelve-point platform statement dubbed, optimistically, "The Porto Alegre Consensus." Among its twelve-point plank of reforms it called for cancellation of debts, a Tobin tax on international financial transfers, local control of the food supply, and the democratization of international financial institutions.

Referring to the 2005 forum, Ignacio Ramonet of Le Monde Diplomatique has commented: "One could see in it a sort of exhaustion of the initial formula: because of the number of participants, the forum couldn't go on being just a space of meeting and debate which didn't give rise to action... [If it does not do this,] it runs the risk of depoliticisation and turning into folklore."

Ignacio Ramonet, "Never Give Up on the Other World," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January, 2006

#### WSF 2006

The sixth WSF was held in three separate centres, First in Bamako in Mali, then in Caracas in Venezuela, and finally in Karachi, Pakistan.

Bamako, The African version of the WSF took place in the capital of Mali from Jan 19-23, with between 10,000 and 15,000 people attending, most from the French-speaking parts of Africa. A dominating theme was the impoverishment and unemployment that drives huge numbers of Africans, often the educated, into emigration. The day before the official opening of the Forum, a conference attended by between 500 and 1,000 people was held both to celebrate the 50 anniversary of the Bandung Conference, which developed into the Non-Aligned Movement and hopefully to begin its resurrection. It was sponsored by various leftist intellectuals and organizations – associated with the "Third Worldism" of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly Samir Amin. François Houtart explained its objective: "is not the 5th International, but the idea is to make initiatives against neo-liberalism and capitalism more coherent."

In a speech given at the conference, Ignacio Ramonet of Le Monde Diplomatique supported this point of view: the WSF should move to a new phase, making concrete common proposals and creating a "collective actor".

The conference produced a 'program of action' called "the Bamako Appeal" which had been drafted by Samir Amin. This declaration, which was opened to signature, listed ten very broad proposals similar to those of the Porto Alegre Consensus at the 2005 WSF. The Brazilian secretariat insisted that they "clarify" that it had no status as a declaration of the Bamako WSF Caracas

The western hemisphere version took place in



lowed by amendments and voting was a "waste of time" for Whittaker.

He also makes it clear that this naked bureaucratism was not entirely uncontested, even amongst the very small circle of Brazilians and their co-thinkers in France and the Far East. He says, "creating an open forum, respectful of all the ideas, initiatives and experiences of civil society was a risky task. During the preparation process and our days in Porto Alegre, there was tension between the concept of mobilising for direct

action and the idea of creating a space predominantly for reflection and debate."

Why reflection and debate cannot lead to decisions is clear only to those who want to prevent any decisions being taken. There is certainly no objection that can be made to providing an open and democratic forum for debate, a place for networking between struggles in different countries and continents – indeed, as we stated above this was the historically progressive role played by

the World and regional Social Forums. But the question is how can all this discussion and networking develop into an effective fightback against neoliberalism, capitalism and imperialism?

The implication of Whitaker and the majority of the WSF leadership's position is that no general global fightback is needed beyond those already being waged by local or single-issue campaigns. At most, on their model, all that needs to be done is to put such campaigns in touch with one another and

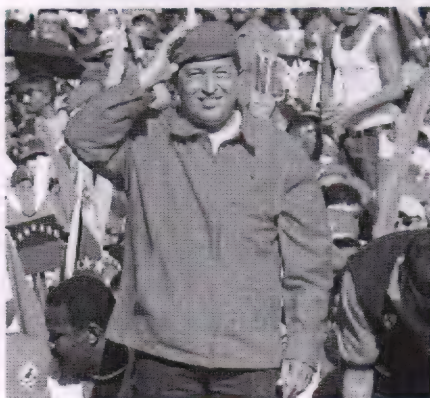
Caracas, Venezuela, between the 23rd and 29th of January with 52,000 participants. Clearly flouting the Porto Alegre Principles President Hugo Chavez played a major role in it, calling on it to "draw up strategies of power in an offensive to build a better world." In front of a 15,000 strong crowd of at the Poliedro Stadium Chavez proclaimed to tumultuous applause, "we will bring down the (US) empire in this century."

He also addressed the Assembly of Social Movements at the end of the Forum, arguing that "We cannot allow the WSF to become a folkloric and touristic event....We must have diversity and autonomy, but also unity in a great anti-imperialist front."

Atilio Boron, an Argentine theorist who is a member of the WSF International Council, called on the WSF to convert itself into "a new International to counter the International of the bourgeoisie." Cited in Jack Hammond, "The Possible World and the Actual State: The World Social Forum in Caracas," *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 148, Vol. 33, No. 3, May 2006, pp. 122-131.

#### Karachi

The Asian version of the WSF took place on March 24-29 with about 30,000 in attendance. There was considerable participation from various sections in struggle: fisherfolk from the Karachi region, peasants from the Punjab, trades unionists fighting privatisation; nationalists from Sindh, Baluchistan, Kashmir and many women's organisations. Reports suggest a very political atmosphere, natural given the military regime. There was good coverage on radio and television, But it to witnessed growing criticism of the way the WSF is run- especially the role of the NGOs. "The NGOs are no substitute for genuine social and political movements. In Africa, Palestine and elsewhere, NGOs have swallowed the neoliberal status quo. They operate like charities, trying to alleviate the worst excesses, but rarely question the systemic basis of the fact that 5 billion citizens of our globe live in poverty. They may be NGOs in Pakistan, but on



Chavez called for the WSF to be anti-imperialist

the global scale they are Western governmental organizations (WGOs), their cash flow conditioned by enforced agendas: former US secretary of state Colin Powell once referred to them as "our fifth column."

Tariq Ali author of *Clash of Fundamentalisms* <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article1877>

Explaining why she had declined to participate, the Indian writer Arundhati Roy said the forum "has now become very NGO-ized and...it's just become too comfortable a stage. And I think it's played a very important role up to now, but now I think we've got to move on from there....I think we have to come up with new strategies." [Remarks made on the TV show "Democracy Now," as reported by Ingmar Lee, "Reflections on Karachi World Social Forum" 28 March, 2006, [Countercurrents.org](http://Countercurrents.org)]

#### 2007 WSF

This year the seventh WSF was held in Nairobi, Kenya 20-25 January 2007 for the first time the numbers fell, to 46,000.

Onyango Oloo, National Coordinator, Kenya Social Forum referred to the 2007 WSF as a "debacle" in terms of its distance from the poorer quarter of Nairobi, its exorbitant cost, its grotesque commercialization, its dictatorial method of translation organizing and its domination by the big NGOs and even churches.

The main protest by the hungry poor was against the WSF; against their exclusion by the prices for entry, food, water which put it beyond them. That people from slums, supported by the left, had to storm the gates to gain entry and force the lowering of the prices for locals from \$7.50 to 75 cents - still a huge sum in a country where 56 percent of the population lives on less than \$1 a day. As a forum which should have pilloried corporate neoliberalism and imperialism for their brutal exploitation of Africa, it was moral disaster. The powerful influence of the churches in Africa - lightly disguised as NGOs (or as we said in the twentieth century charities - meant that reactionary social doctrines on birth control, the role of women, gays and lesbians were on display. In what sense these reactionary forces are compatible with the "principles" enshrined in the Porto Alegre Charter we will leave to the high priests of this document to divine. Of course according to the methodology of the WSF huge Catholic charities like Caritas, constitute part of civil society, whereas workers parties struggling against capitalism are not. Firoze Manji in *Pambazuka News* considers that the WSF had been transformed into "just another NGO fair".

"Ironically, it is unfortunate that in the multiplicity of activities, the Nairobi session ended completely unfocused and with no message or rallying point to respond to or mitigate the negative consequences and dimensions of globalization." Steve Ouma, *Pambazuka News*, February 7 2007 on: Sun 25 of Feb, 2007 [10:07]

<http://www.openspaceforum.net/>

The International Council of the WSF meeting at the end of the forum decided that the eighth WSF will not take place till 2009 and did not fix a venue.

No wonder Walden Bello has questioned whether the WSF is of any further use to those actually fighting the ravages of corporate power, "free" trade, the "endless a war" and all the other effects of imperialism.



swap ideas as to objectives and method of campaigning. Thus the Principles ban decision making altogether:

"The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body. It thus does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings."

What Whittaker wants to cast aside is the very idea that the movement brings together different political forces who will struggle for its leadership. Related to this is the banning of the open participation of political parties at the forum. It was because, for Whittaker, the forum itself should not struggle for power, that politics were excluded. While politics may be easily done away with in the sphere of pure thought, the reality of the struggles of the social movements against neoliberalism and war demonstrated they were highly political struggles. Indeed, the imposition of a neoliberal programme by states across the globe raised the question of political power for all those that confronted it – how do we replace these governments and what do we replace them with?

To say otherwise is to engage the masses in an illusion. Whittaker was actually attempting just that – an illusionist's trick. This is because, far from opposing politics per se, Whittaker was a key theorist of Lula's Workers Party which had been elected to office in 2002. His government had attacked landless peasants and sections of the working class, and complied with the IMF and World Bank's debt repayments. Lula had spoken at a number of the forums in a "personal capacity" to mass crowds in huge stadiums. By trying to keep politics out of the forum, Whittaker was able to stop forum participants – many of whom were angry with Lula's policies – from using the forum to challenge him. They were prevented because the forum had no democratic structures or means for taking political positions.

But wait a minute! Who had the power to decide this? As the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci once remarked, "leadership is the first principle of politics". Despite what it claimed, the WSF was no exception. The Porto Alegre Principles were decided at a meeting organised by the Brazilian sponsoring organisations.

Those who already possessed the power hypocritically forbade anyone to dispute them. Having climbed the ladder, they unceremoniously kicked it down.

The real WSF leadership, the Brazilian Organising Committee, which later became the International Secretariat, were not even elected, let alone subject to recall by the social forums – they simply co-opted those who they thought were representative and trustworthy. The International Council with between 100 and 150 members was – and remains – just a sounding board. Even if the likes of Whitaker and Cassen lost a majority on it, like the Polish Sejm (parliament) in the eighteenth century, it can be prevented from taking action by the unanimity rule: anyone can veto it with the

### **The real WSF leadership, the Brazilian Organising Committee, which later became the International Secretariat, were not even elected, let alone subject to recall by the social forums, they simply co-opted those who they thought were representative and trustworthy**

cry "no consensus". What was even more remarkable was that the Charter of Principles, despite being imposed from without on regional forums like the European Social Forum, could not be changed or amended by these bodies. Indeed, it is not clear if anybody could change them except the original cabal that drafted them. And even it would have to be unanimous.

Chico Whitaker – clearly a master of doublethink – elaborates: "A space has no leader. It is only a place, basically a horizontal space... It is like a square without an owner." This is manifestly not true. The WSF leadership considers the "social forum" brand its own, and has rudely intervened to call to order any grouping, even the organisers of regional forums, if

they defy the rules.

For instance, sharp exchanges occurred with the organisers of the first ESF in Florence on the role of political parties and on the anti-war theme they wanted the forum as a whole to address. At the Florence ESF in 2002, Rifondazione Comunista was very prominent and the Assembly of Social Movements, which convened on the last day of the Forum, undoubtedly spoke for the forum as a whole when it called for millions to march against war – a call that was answered in the mass demonstrations across the globe in February 2003.

Likewise, last year Samir Amin and the organisers of the discussions which led to the Bamako Appeal of the World Social Forum in 2006 (see previous page) were sent a stiff rebuke by Whitaker and were forced to "recant" their claim that the Bamako Appeal had any status as the statement of the African version of the 'polycentric' WSF. Likewise, Whitaker and co. rubbish the 'Porto Alegre Consensus', a reformist manifesto developed at a seminar during the 2005 WSF by a number of well known activists and academics, as having no more status than the hundreds of other pieces of paper fluttering on the wall of proposals in the press centre of the forum.

In practice, political parties have been clearly visible at the forums – although at times more openly than others. The Mumbai WSF 2004 and the Athens ESF 2006 almost completely disregarded the rules, with political parties playing a prominent role. Anyone who has been to the Porto Alegre forums would have found it impossible to miss not only the Brazilian Workers Party, but the smaller, more radical left parties like the P-SOL and PSTU.

Whittaker time and again has appealed to a postmodern framework, to justify the 'space' conception and its apparent separation from the sphere of power and politics: "In summary, the WSF and its Charter of Principles seek to create a new imaginary ways of conceiving public space, politics, democracy and citizenship, an imaginary distinct from the politics of modernity."<sup>10</sup>

### **HE WHO PAYS THE PIPER CALLS THE TUNE?**

The point of holding the WSF in Porto Alegre was that the Brazilian Workers Party held power both in the city and in the federal state, Rio Grande do Sul,



where it is located. The state is the richest in Brazil and hardly typical of the global south. Indeed, in 2002 the municipality of Porto Alegre provided \$300,000 and the state of Rio Grande do Sul \$1 million for the second WSF. In 2003, however, the electoral defeat of the PT in the October 2002 state elections led to a slashing of support for the WSF.

Nevertheless the city government of Porto Alegre and the newly elected federal government of Inacio Lula da Silva made up for loss. By the fourth WSF in 2005 the PT had lost control of Porto Alegre too, which meant a further cut in funding by the incoming right wing city administration. Other major sources for funding the WSF have been the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the European Union.

Similar reasons underlay the holding of the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002 and Paris in 2004. Various municipalities controlled by the left in Italy – the Democrats of the Left (PDS) and Rifondazione Comunista, plus left-wing Catholic institutions, were willing to fund the Florence ESF, and in Paris a year later the Socialist Party mayor Bertrand Delanoë and even Jaques Chirac helped fund it. In London in 2004 the role of the London Mayor and his entourage was equally vital to the funding and facilities – though clearly the funds made available (half the £1 million of the total cost) resulted in a stark contrast with the preceding ESFs – Paris had a sliding scale by income from 3 euros to 50 euros, most people paying towards the bottom of the scale. In neoliberal London, however, entrance costs were £20 if paid in advance and £30 on the door. The unemployed and students were offered a “generous” discount of £10 on these prices.

Thus it is clear that the support of the WSF and ESF by forces that are an integral part of administering capitalism, that are at best “social liberal” in their outlook, acts as a real constraint on what the organisers are prepared to let the social forums become. In the words of Marx, “social being determines consciousness” or in a more vulgar expression “he who pays the piper calls the tune.”

### THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM IN CRISIS

The European anti-neoliberal left, which formed at the European Social Forum in



Students demonstrate at French ESF 2003: the hold of reformists in Attac and the Left Bloc have squandered the opportunities presented by student struggles

November 2002, has over the past year entered into a real crisis. The reasons for this lie in the political trajectory of its major component – the parties which compose the European Left Party (ELP), the former or reformed Communist Parties.

Rifondazione Comunista (RC) in Italy was at the centre of the Florence ESF in 2002, the Parti Communiste Française (PCF) at the Paris Social Forum of 2003, Synaspismos at the Athens Social Forum in 2006, and the Party of Democratic Socialism-Left Party (PDS-LP) will be central to the anti-G8 protests at Rostock in Germany in June 2007.

The degree to which the wheel of the ELP's reformism has come full circle can be seen in the case of Rifondazione Comunista. At Florence its leader Fausto Bertinotti drew thunderous applause when he criticised himself for having supported the Olive Tree Coalition government of Romano Prodi in 1996-98. Prodi went on to design the Lisbon Agenda, the programme of neoliberal counter-reforms adopted by the European Union in 2000. “Never again!” cried Bertinotti. RC representatives attended all the international meetings of the ESF, advocating an anti-neoliberal alternative to Lisbon.

So when Rifondazione entered another

neoliberal Romano Prodi government a year ago, the Italian No Global and antiwar movements went into decline. Prodi has survived two major crises over the occupation of Afghanistan and the expansion of the huge American airbase at Vicenza. He survived both thanks to Rifondazione's support in parliamentary votes of confidence.

Indeed, he extracted a promise from RC's parliamentarians not to vote against the government again. Fearful of the return of the corrupt Silvio Berlusconi, even Rifondazione's left wing – including Franco Turigliatto, a member of the Fourth International – did not dare to reject his blackmail.

Rifondazione and the Democrats of the Left have ceased mobilising on the streets, supported sending Italian troops to Lebanon and tolerated their supposedly humanitarian role in Afghanistan. Only 30,000 answered the call of the ESF to demonstrate against the war in March.

In France in the second half of 2006, the powerful “No” of the Left Bloc, which mobilised to reject the neoliberal European Constitution in the referendum in May 2005, shattered over the issue of the 2007 presidential elections. The uprising of the oppressed youth in the suburbs – *banlieues* – in November 2005 and the mass youth and worker



revolt against anti-youth employment laws – the CPE – the following spring, reached the scale of a nationwide rolling strike, terrifying the government who backed down, leaving a hole in its neoliberal agenda.

Yet when it came to the elections, the attempt to mount a “unity” candidate shattered. The PCF refused to renounce participation in a neoliberal Socialist Party government. The pathetic 1.5 per cent vote for its candidate, Marie-Georges Buffet, was fair punishment.

In Germany, too, the movement to create a new working class party was shipwrecked by the split from the Social-Democrats (SPD), the WASG (Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative). Rather than representing the militant resistance to the neoliberal Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV attacks (Germany’s implementation of the Lisbon agenda), they fused with the PDS-LP, which was already in coalition with the SPD in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, and carrying out neoliberal cuts and privatisations. Linksruck, the German section of the International Socialism Tendency (the international organisation run by the British Socialist Workers Party), support the fusion and denounce those who seek to challenge it from within the left of the WASG, including the German supporters of this journal.

As in France and Italy, the lure of office, even at the cost of signing up to neoliberal reforms, exposes the fraudulent “anti-neoliberalism” of the European Left Party’s component national parties.

The European Anticapitalist Left – a supposed far left alternative to the ELP – has also failed to rise to the challenges of leadership. Its parties too have been seduced into seeing the question primarily in electoral terms. In Britain Respect, a creature of the Socialist Workers Party, has opted for a populist electoral machine, helping to abort moves to create a new working class party after 10 years of neoliberal Labour government.

They have created a cross-class bloc with moderate Islamists and Muslim businessmen in the chase for parliamentary and council seats. Add to this the self-destruction of the Scottish Socialist Party – also a member of the EAL – and it is clear that in Britain the wishes of vanguard fighters to build an alternative to Labour have been badly let down by

these “leaders”.

This all represents a criminal frittering away of the enormous waves of anti-neoliberal and anti-war struggles of 2000 to 2006. The ELP is totally unfit to lead the anticapitalist movement; and the European Anticapitalist Left offers no consistent alternative to it, often working to shield it from effective criticism.

Yet there are repeated signs that mass resistance to imperialist war and neoliberalism in Europe has not disappeared. Time and again it is regenerated by the bosses’ attacks, by the threat of new wars, by EU and government legislation.

The 1.5 million votes for Olivier Besancenot of the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire in France (a section of the Fourth International), who spoke out in defence of the rebellion by the youth of the banlieues and for the anti-CPE movement, shows that militants preferred him to the PCF, and also to Lutte Ouvrière and Attac, both of which were marginal to these struggles.

In Spain this March, 400,000 demonstrated against war. In Greece there have been large-scale, sustained and militant student demonstrations against the neoliberal educational “reform”. In Austria in January, youth and trade unionists protested against the social democrats’ sell-out of its own election programme in order to enter a coalition with the right.

The regular setbacks in Europe, their failure to result in new organisations, are a direct result of the crisis of leadership, in particular the left reformist and post-Stalinist parties centred on the European Left Party. The “far left” forces regularly demonstrate their unwillingness and inability to present a principled opposition or practical alternative to them. The urgent task of revolutionaries is to combat reformism and centrism and fight for political and organisational forms for consistent anticapitalism: revolutionary communism.

## THE SPECTRE OF A FIFTH INTERNATIONAL

In the face of persistent calls for the WSF and the ESF to go beyond a talking shop and coordinate action, the right wing have often issued a threat to cow the softer of their left-wing opponents. If you want the WSF to evolve beyond a space into a movement and to take political initiatives, then before you know it you will have a Fifth International.

François Houtart, the Belgian

antiglobalisation writer, in a discussion of the alternative directions for the World Social Forum in 2003, with heavy irony described them as a “fifth International or activists’ Woodstock.”

The Brazilian and French “leadership” of the World Social Forum have also repeatedly used the idea as a bugbear to frighten and silence their opponents.

Thus four years ago Bernard Cassen, then honorary president of Attac, declared himself firmly opposed to what he calls the “throbbing temptation of the Fifth International”.<sup>11</sup> He went on:

“The holders of the conception of the Forum as movement have tried constantly, in all the leading bodies, to nibble or circumvent the conception of the Forum as space, without openly acknowledging it.”

The “left” in the WSF and ESF have been forced by these attacks to take up the issue, albeit to deny the charge. Writer Michael Lowy noted that a French bourgeois newspaper had spoken recently of “the danger of a Fifth International” but insisted he preferred a new international “without name or number” ... odd, you might think, for a member of the Fourth International.

South African author Patrick Bond in the book, *The New Politics of Empire*, has a section of his essay called “Next steps: towards a fifth international”. Welcoming the rise of the anticapitalist movement, he argues: “The time may well arise for a formalisation of the movement’s character in explicitly political terms, such as within the traditions of international socialism – for which the four internationals provide a host of lessons.”

More strikingly still in August 2006 Samir Amin, a celebrated author of anti-imperialist and third worldist works since the 1950s, wrote an article entitled *Towards a Fifth International?* In it he posed the question:

“Should we conclude that a new International is needed to assure the convergence of the struggles of the people against capital?”

He answers: “I do not hesitate to give a positive answer to this question, on the condition that the envisioned new International is conceived in the same way as the First, but not as the Second, the Third, or the Fourth Internationals. It should be a socialist/communist International open to all who want to act together to create convergence in diversity. Socialism (or Communism) would





Protestors, London 2004: the WSF called the historic day in February 2003 that saw 30 million people demonstrate worldwide, but it failed to build on this by organising against the occupation

thus be seen as the product of the movement, and not as something that is deduced from a previous definition."

It is certainly useful when prominent writers start a debate on this question, on the need for a new or even a fifth International. Indeed it is high time to debate this question. The time is long gone when any fighting worker can accept an activists' Woodstock, an open forum celebrating diversity rather than forging unity between different forces. The deadly earnestness of struggles since the murder of Carlo Giuliani in Florence in 2001 have posed time and again the need to unite in action across a range of issues – war, privatization, debt and poverty, climate change, racism and *précarité*.

That is why in Florence in 2002, the predecessor of the League for the Fifth International, together with the socialist youth movement Revolution, submitted a resolution to the Coordination that prepared the Assembly of Social Movements. It read:

"Starting with a Europe-wide day of action against the war ... we will continue to campaign:

1by means of mass demonstrations, civil disobedience and obstruction of the "war effort";

1by means of boycotts of the state and

corporate institutions of the perpetrators and supporters of this war;

1by campaigning for strikes in workplaces, schools and colleges.

Our aim is to prevent a war being launched. If we fail in this we will campaign by militant means to force its cessation and the withdrawal of the attackers. We hope our actions will encourage the resistance of the Iraqi, Palestinian and Arab peoples and help them to defeat the imperialist attack. To them – from Florence – we send a message of solidarity and encouragement: you are not alone! We will do everything in our power to strike the weapons of mass destruction from the hands of 'our own' rulers."

We argued for a series of key demands that would take the ESF forward. These included:

1a co-ordinated campaign of mass demonstrations and direct action against the war with a central orientation to winning the labour movement to strike action solidarity with any Iraqi resistance to invasion and with the Palestinian Intifada

1a Europe-wide campaign against all closures and redundancies stemming from the economic recession, centring on the FIAT workers

1a Europe-wide campaign against the neoliberal privatisation policies of the European Union and its member governments

1a campaign against state and far-right racism in the EU, in solidarity with migrants and asylum seekers, demanding their free entry and full civil rights

1a co-ordinated campaign in solidarity with the peoples of Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia under attack from the IMF and groaning under the burden of debt to the western banks and with workers in struggle for jobs, trade union and democratic rights and a living wage.

Though the decision of the Assembly was nowhere near as clear about the need for ongoing and escalating direct action to actually stop a war or to bring about the defeat of the imperialists, it did call for a worldwide day of action for 15 February 2003. This was its most progressive step, one it has unfortunately never repeated.

The Paris ESF in 2003 had much less of the heady enthusiasm of Florence. Whilst 15 February was a remarkable triumph, with more than 20 million demonstrating worldwide and huge demonstrations of millions in Spain, Italy and Britain, the leaders of the anti-war movements – largely the left wing leaders of ESF – failed to agitate for strike action by the trade unions and failed to criticise the inaction of the leaders of the biggest unions, many of whom came near to pledging such action on the platforms of the 15 February demonstrations. The IST and the Fourth International, so delighted to have formed a bloc with the union leaders, were willing to back down on calls for immediate mass strike action, letting the leaders off the hook and leaving the movement unable to halt or even seriously to obstruct the war when it came.

However, in some respects, the Paris ESF saw the closest involvement of trade unionists yet. Prominent in many sessions were members and leaders of the more radical wing of the European union leaders: the CGT and G10-Solidaires of France, CGIL, FIOM and COBAS of Italy, the RMT of Britain, IG Metall and verdi of Germany, and so on. The crucial issues at this Forum were first to revive the anti-war movement in the form of militant opposition to the occupation of Iraq and support the growing armed resistance there, and second to coordinate the growing resistance to the Lisbon Agenda of neoliberal reformism across Europe.



The 500-strong meeting of the German delegation had many rank and file trade unionists present from IG Metall and Verdi. The opportunities for the Assembly of Social Movements to launch coordinated action were not taken. Why? Out of fear of a conflict with the bureaucrats of the larger trade unions and the reformist parties.

On Iraq, the strongest thing the organisers of the Assembly would commit themselves to was the statement that: "We are fighting for the withdrawal of the occupations forces from Iraq and for the immediate restitution of sovereignty to the Iraqi people".

And on the fight against the Lisbon onslaught, which had seen major struggles that year in France and Germany, the assembly said only: "We engage ourselves to take part in all the actions organised by the social movements, in particular to build for a common day of action supported by the social movements, notably by the European trade union movements."

In 2004, the London ESF was in all respects a disastrous missed opportunity. It was strangled by the bureaucratic control of a thoroughly unsympathetic London mayorality, burdened with an exceptionally high entrance price, formally backed by trade union leaders who did absolutely nothing to inform or mobilise their members to attend.

Still 20,000 to 25,000 people turned up, despite an almost complete absence of publicity. Yet still the far left forces, especially the Socialist Workers Party, refused to break their alliance with the left union leaders and the Mayor, shielding them from any practical criticism and opposing all attempts to get the Assembly of Social Movements to adopt a fighting campaign for coordinated European action.

## DEAD GRASP THE LIVING

If the global movement that developed after 1999 showed the potential and the need for the development of a new International, it also proved that the fragments of the old Internationals still exist. What these forces brought to the movement was not the lessons of the great achievements and gains of the first four Internationals, but rather a contemporary expression of the self same political errors and weaknesses that had destroyed each of the four Internationals as world parties of social revolution.

Each of the four Internationals repre-

## What sort of international do we need?

Like the First, the Fifth International will need to draw the broadest layers of fighting forces together – but it must move on, unhesitatingly, to define its political goals. It must resolutely reject any strategy that renounces the only methods that can defeat capitalism: working class government and working class power.

Like the Second, the Fifth International must use the techniques of mass political action to rally not scores of hundreds in propaganda societies, but hundreds of thousands to parties of the working class. But we must never repeat the fatal error of tolerating reformist officials and careerist place-seekers in our ranks. Bureaucracy, national chauvinism, parliamentary or trade union reformism mean bloody defeat for the anticapitalist movement.

Like the Third, the Fifth International must combine the maximum internal democracy with the maximum unity in action; both are preconditions for effective revolutionary struggle. But Communist Parties that rally to the call for the Fifth International must break with the reactionary programme of Stalinism, its shameful methods and its cowardly goals.

Like the Fourth in its early years, the Fifth International must be prepared to swim against the stream, explicit about its revolutionary methods and goals. Unlike the Fourth International today, it must shoulder its own responsibilities, not try to shift them onto "history" or "the process". It must be unsparing in its criticisms of those centrists who shield the reformist leaders from revolutionary criticism.

There will be no lack of opportunities to transform what people call the new internationalism into a new International. The mass struggles of the last 10 years herald still greater days to come. Revolutionary crises and the chance to take power will emerge in South America, the Middle East, Europe and Asia over the years ahead. To go from protests to power, however, demands the formation of a Fifth International.

sented a great gain for the anticapitalist workers of the world. In their heyday they represented a deadly threat to the exploiters. This meant that the capitalists used every possible means to divert them from their anticapitalist goals and break them up.

By means of direct pressure from without, and from bourgeois and petit-bourgeois forces within, each of these Internationals collapsed as an effective instrument of social revolution. As a result, what remain of them today, the anarchist, social democratic, Stalinist and centrist "Trotskyist" traditions, represent their period of degeneration and betrayal, still misleading working class struggles.

Anarchists - with their prejudices against mass organisation, phobias about politics, leadership, decision-making, and confusions as to what constitutes the working class, represent the degeneration phase of the First International. ATTAC, the PT of Lula in Brazil, continue the class collaboration of the Second International after 1914, just as Rifondazione Comunista and the French Communist Party (PCF) do with the class collaborationist 'people's front' policy of the Third International under

Stalin.

Today, the Fourth International and its fragments – from the French LCR to the British SWP – continue the unprincipled policy adopted in 1951 of adapting systematically to the programmes and leaders of the Second and Third Internationals, in the hope that they will automatically evolve in the direction of revolution through the unfolding of a disembodied "process". They convert the active programme of Leninism-Trotskyism into passive adaptation, placing onto 'history' (in fact onto the existing reformist leaderships) the very tasks that fall to the revolutionaries themselves: actively to work to expose and break the hold of the reformist apparatuses of treason over the workers, not just on the page, but actively at the heart of the struggle.

These forces of the dead grasp hold of the living at the crucial point of every struggle, holding us back from settling final accounts with our historic enemy. We need a new leadership, a new instrument of struggle, a new world party. Everything essential and vital in the early years of the previous four Internationals can be preserved and restored only by founding a new Fifth International.



On the basis of the lessons to be learnt from the previous four Internationals, and by analysing the new reality of globalisation, predatory war, mounting inter-imperialist rivalry and revolutionary upheavals that we face today, a new programme must be elaborated and a new international fighting party must be built in every country.

## THE NEXT STEPS

We have to fight openly at the Social Forums and the Assemblies of Social Movements for a new formation that gathers together the fighting battalions of the world movement. This needs to break with the paralysis and 'lowest common denominator' approach of the Assemblies of Social Movements, let alone abide by the rotten Porto Alegre Principles.

But there is no need to wait for the next meetings of the World or continental Social Forums.

The anti-imperialist forces which crystallised at the Athens ESF as a left wing opposition to the official leadership; the sections of the trade union movement resisting Prodi in Italy; all those in France who want to fight Sarkozy's offensive in the workplaces and on the streets; the fighters against the foreign and domestic plunders of their countries across Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and South Asia: these are the forces that can and must convene an anticapitalist conference to adopt a real programme of action and at the same time debate out the strategic principles of a permanent worldwide organisation for fighting capitalism.

In order to express the real historic interests of the working class movement, and to challenge the essence of capitalism, and not just this or that expression of it, these movements will need to agree to struggle for political power. The new International will therefore be a political party or it will not be an International at all.

A strong working class International will not bring the era of broad global movements of the rural and urban poor, of indigenous peoples and oppressed nations, of women and youth, of persecuted immigrant communities to an end. To suggest this is what effective leadership and democratic centralisation means is to mistake Stalinism for Leninism. Instead, we should stand in the tradition of Lenin's *What is to Be Done*, which insisted that a revolution-

ary must be "the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects, but will deepen it and raise it to a higher level". And in the tradition of Lenin who gave the Communist International its slogan "Workers and Oppressed Peoples of the World Unite!"

While the pro-bourgeois elements will undoubtedly withdraw from such a formation, this would be no loss. Those anarchists, too, that put their individual autonomy higher than collective action, for whom a democratically arrived at decision by a majority is a hateful tyranny, can remain in their little communes trying to change capitalism behind its back. Such "losses" would be more than compensated by the tremendous attractive power that the strength of workers action can bring to all campaigns and initiatives.

Forces within the social forums have demanded a radical change from the "open space" approach. Writers such as Arundhati Roy and Samir Amin, well known activists like Trevor Ngwane, have correctly stigmatised the paralysis and called for a new organisation, even a new International. These organisations and individuals need to progress beyond appeals to the leaders to change. The servants of big capital will never willingly relax their grip. Nor will their libertarian dupes stop trying to block any political decision making, content with playing the role of jesters at the court of capital. Their grip on the world anticapitalist movement must be broken.

What does this mean immediately? The genuinely anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist left needs to gather its forces and plan how to achieve this. We must unite the left in the ESF and WSF, in the regional and national social forums and gatherings like Rostock, to fight for the creation of permanent delegate-based, elected, coordinating bodies that can:

- issue calls to action on the burning issues of the international class struggle
- prepare the way for a structured Congress in which organisational and programmatic issues can be debated out, amended and adopted.

In Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia there are massive struggles unfolding. The forces calling for such a change today are many and varied. We can take real steps together to win the mass forces

to the project of a new, fighting International. In the process they can achieve greater programmatic clarity, hammering out a strategy for world working class power, the communism of the 21st century. Along this road a Fifth International can and must be built.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The leftward development of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela has been an important exception to this: see Fifth International volume 2 issue 2.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Cassen, *Tout a commencé à Porto Alegre: mille forums sociaux!* (Everything began at Porto Alegre: a thousand social forums), Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Lyotard said, 'The idea of progress as possible, probable or necessary was rooted in the certainty that the development of the arts, technology, knowledge and liberty would be profitable to mankind as a whole. After two centuries, we are more sensitive to signs of the contrary. Neither economic nor political liberalism, nor the various Marxisms, emerge from the sanguinary last two centuries free from the suspicion of crimes against mankind... What kind of thought is able to sublate (aufheben) Auschwitz in a general (either empirical or speculative) process towards a universal emancipation' in Lyotard, J., F., *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, Minuit, Paris.

<sup>4</sup> *Essential Works of Foucault 1954 - 1984*, Vol. 3, Penguin, New York, pp. 449 - 453

<sup>5</sup> The full quote: "is one right to revolt or not? Let us leave the question open. People do revolt; that is a fact", in Michel Foucault, "Useless to Revolt", *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954 - 1984*, Vol. 3, Penguin, New York, pp. 449 - 453

<sup>6</sup> Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens

<sup>7</sup> Brazilian Organising Committee, *World Social Forum Charter of Principles*, [http://www.forum-socialmundial.org.br/main.php?id\\_menu=4&cd\\_language=2](http://www.forum-socialmundial.org.br/main.php?id_menu=4&cd_language=2)

<sup>8</sup> Francisco Whitaker\* <http://www.fsmt.org.co/eng-origen.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Antonio Gramsci, 'The Modern Prince, Antonio Gramsci; Selections from the Prison Notebooks,

<sup>10</sup> ('An Introduction', from *Summit Sieges and Social Forums - A Rough Guide to the Anticapitalist Movement*, League for the Fifth International, 2004.)

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Cassen *Tout a commencé à Porto Alegre: ....Mille Forums Sociaux!* Paris, October 2003)



# The postmodernist sickness in the anti-capitalist movement

The influence of postmodernism has held back the movement, argues **Luke Cooper**

Probably the most sophisticated expression of the postmodern theory that has been used to support the idea that the World Social Forum should not organise struggles and should remain merely a space is that of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Professor of Sociology at the School of Economics, University of Coimbra in Portugal.

He is worth quoting at length:

"The WSF is the first critical utopia of the twenty-first century an aims to break with the tradition of the critical utopias of western modernity. (...) The utopia of the WSF is a radically democratic utopia. It is the only realistic utopia after a century of conservative utopias. Some of them the result of perverted critical utopias. This utopian design, grounded on the denial of the present rather than the definition of the future, focused on the processes of intercourse amongst the movements rather than an assessment of the movements' political content, is the major factor of cohesion of the WSF. It helps to maximize what unites and minimize what divides, celebrate the intercourse rather than dispute power, be a strong presence rather than an agenda. This utopian design which is also an ethical design, privileges the ethical discourse, quite evident in the WSF's Charter of Principles, aimed at gathering consensus beyond the ideological and political cleavages among the movements and organisations which compose it."

What is striking about this passage is the looseness with which the term "utopia" is used, to both describe the failed utopias of modernity, i.e., for de Sousa, the various currents of socialism and liberalism, and the project of the WSF. This confuses a general goal or objective, with a utopian goal that is unachievable – an idea not possible within the actual conditions of reality. For

instance, while it was possible for classical Greek scholars to conceive of the concept of genuine equality amongst the people neither the productive base to create a society of abundance, nor the class force with an interest in pursuing it, existed to end class society.

De Sousa however, argues that the concept of utopia needs to be changed, from an idea of a definition of the future, i.e. a goal, towards something which is perceived to exist in the actual struggles of today. This is what he calls the "denials of the present" – an oblique and postmodern way to describe struggles against existing orders. Thus, for de Sousa the WSF is the utopia in that it allows a space for struggles to gather together – have "intercourse" – and in its charter of principles establishes a set of ethical values based on consensus decision making.

Despite lacing his approach with postmodern rhetoric, a grand narrative is clearly present here. What de Sousa does is romanticize the social struggles, to the extent that they are seen as the goal – utopia – once a space is established that aggregates them together. What is missing is an analysis of the social and political forces these struggles oppose and how to get rid of them – indeed, such a goal-centred approach is theorised away by de Sousa. Of course, the struggles against neoliberalism can be hugely inspiring but to describe them as the goal is to ignore the terrible conditions and injustices they are fighting. In short, to ignore the existence of capitalism as a system which is fundamentally exploitative and oppressive, and the role of the state in regulating it and defending it against those that challenge it.

Of course this approach is not new. It is a historic feature of de Sousa Santos' own political tradition, reformist Social Democracy. At the very birth of this tra-

dition lies the famous dictum of Eduard Bernstein: "The final goal, whatever it may be, is nothing to me: the movement is everything!"

Our reply to its latest reincarnation remains the one Rosa Luxemburg delivered as long ago as 1898: "The conquest of political power remains the final goal and that final goal remains the soul of the struggle. The working class cannot take the decadent position of the philosophers: 'The final goal is nothing to me, the movement is everything.' No, on the contrary, without relating the movement to the final goal, the movement as an end in itself is nothing to me, the final goal is everything."

Our anticapitalist goal – the expropriation of the exploiters and the destruction of their instrument of repression, the capitalist state, is no airy utopia dreamed up by Marxists, but based upon an analysis of the actual reality – the real existing conditions – against which struggles take place. Far from slipping in to one-sidedness, it must recognize the contradictory development of capitalism. The capitalist system has socialized production to a huge extent – creating great industries, globally connected workforces, production networks and large productive units – but the benefits of these great developments accrue to a small class of exploiters. By creating a global working class and great technological and industrial change, capitalism creates the material conditions for its own destruction because the exploited working class has both the interest and power to overthrow the system of exploitation.

Pointing to the overall combined character of the capitalist system in no sense precludes understanding its unevenness, particularities and diversity. Likewise, it does not preclude but actually aids



analysing such issues as national and racial oppression, indigenism, religion, the land question and the stratification of the peasantry, the differences within the working class, and so on. In short, Marxism is perfectly capable of understanding and developing strategies for addressing the diversities of life on our planet, including the many economic, social and ideological survivals of previous modes of production.

In this way it is capable in Lenin's words of making a "concrete analysis of a concrete situation". At the same time, by pointing to the systemic problem of the destructiveness of capitalist production and its systematic reproduction of inequalities, it is able to explain how the multiple forms of exploitation and oppression beside that of labour by capital can be tackled at root only if the "property question" is posed: who controls the means of production, the means with which to reproduce the social – the workers or the rich?

The analytical coherence and method of Marxism causes offense to postmodernists, who perceive it to be an extreme example of modernist thinking as it seeks to establish objective truth, through reason and empirical investigation, of both the natural and social worlds. For Marxism, uncovering such knowledge is a practical question. As Marx said, to ask whether a world exists externally to thought is simply scholastic, as such a world is presupposed and demonstrated in every example of human activity.<sup>1</sup> It is because Marxism is a philosophy of practice that it seeks to derive from this theoretical foundation a programme of political action for human emancipation – and this opens up the second great tension with the postmodernists of the social movements.

Over the development of capitalist modernity a number of Marxists have tackled the question of how to turn the struggles of today into a struggle for socialism. As Marxist ideas have often dominated radical movements from the 19th century onwards, its history of development is not only a question of abstract theorising, but of the actual revolutions and counter-revolutions of the last century. As so many academics and postmodern theorists simply equate Marxism with Stalinism, they studiously ignore the historical fact that revolutionaries like Leon Trotsky challenged the counter-revolutionary theory and practice of Stalin and his supporters in the



**"Under Zapatism what is tactics for a movement may be strategy for another and the terms may mean different things for different struggles in different parts of the world and in some of them may even be utterly meaningless" – de Sousa**

Communist International.

An analysis of the history of the 20th century, far from revealing the death agony of Marxism, demonstrates the need for a revolution to rid humanity of class society. The experience of central and western Europe in the 1930s through to Chile and Argentina in the 1970s shows that no capitalist class has ever allowed its power to be eroded piecemeal to the point that it can no longer defend its property. Even at the level of the 'commonsensical rather than theoretical knowledge' that de Sousa Santos says he prefers, this is true.

De Sousa Santos draws on the experience of the Zapatistas – what he calls "subaltern cosmopolitanism" – to declare the object of the movement "to make the world less and less comfortable for global capital." The idea that you can with impunity destabilise or make the world less comfortable for capitalism without suffering the repression of the state machine is frivolous. To give such advice to the workers and peasants is

potentially disastrous – an example par excellence of the irresponsibility of a privileged intelligentsia socially cut off from the dangerous repercussions of its own incoherence. Nor is bourgeois state repression rendered impossible even when radicals assume governmental power within the structures of a bourgeois state: for instance, the radical reformist regime of Chavez, who despite his nationalisations-with-compensation has not systematically challenged the property rights of the bourgeoisie, has had to rely on the mobilisation of the masses to defend his regime against the counter-revolutionary forces of the state.

Of course our post modernist imagines that he and the political current he represents have done something very new and have overthrown (in his mind alone!) the antipodes of reform or revolution:

"Rebellion and non-conformity must be privileged to the detriment of the old strategic options (reform or revolution). There is no unique theory to guide the movements strategically because the aim is not so much to seize state power as to confront the many faces of power as they present themselves in the institutions of society at large. Social emancipation does not have a general historical subject. In the struggle comprising the WSF, subjects are all those that refuse to be objects, that is to say to be reduced to the condition of vassals."

Or elsewhere, he argues:

"Under Zapatism what is tactics for a movement may be strategy for another and the terms may mean different things for different struggles in different parts of the world and in some of them may even be utterly meaningless. Moreover, no unified theory can possibly render the immense mosaic of movements, struggles and initiatives in a coherent way."<sup>2</sup>

The emphasis de Sousa places on plurality and difference is typical of postmodern schools of thought and takes as its theoretical foundation the view that "knowledge claims" about the world are inherently uncertain and contingent. Thus, they argue political programmes cannot claim objectivity. What this implicitly denies is that, while claims to objective truth are contested, political programmes can also appeal to the objective world, i.e. the programmes of the social movements can be practically tested in the class struggle.

In addition, De Sousa's rejection of the working class as a key force in political



and social change and his celebration of subjectivity is not a new idea, but a return to early modern concepts of populism. This leads him to reject the very idea of a working class international:

"The internationalism promoted by the WSF represents a stark departure from the old internationalism that dominated anticapitalist politics throughout the twentieth century... The latter was based on a privileged social actor (workers or workers and peasants) a privileged type of organisation (trade unions and working class parties together with their federations and Internationals) a centrally defined strategy (the Internationals' resolutions): a politics originating in the North and formulated according to the political principles prevailing in the anticapitalist North. The emphasis was on social and political homogeneity, as a condition of unity and solidarity... On the contrary the internationalism of the WSF elaborates social, political and cultural diversity within the broad limits set by the Charter of Principles."<sup>3</sup>

Again, what it denies is that class forces are constituted objectively, in the course of the reproduction of capitalism as a social system. It is the power of the working class by withdrawing its labour, the centrality of labour to value creation and thus to profit, the growth of the proletariat in the course of global capital accumulation, the reality of working class political combination and above all the 'universality' of the working class in that it is the bearer of no new exploitative social system but of the classless society or communism, that gives the proletariat a critical and leading role in the struggle for human emancipation.

The political goals, programme and strategy of this approach is clear: for working class power and socialism. As would be expected, De Sousa's conclusions are quite different:

"Instead of theory that unifies the immense variety of struggles and movements, what we need is a theory of translation – that is, a theory that rather than aiming at creating another (theoretical) reality over and above the movements, seeks to create mutual understanding, mutual intelligibility among them so that they may benefit from the experiences of others and network with them. Instead of our rarified descriptions the procedure of translation rests on thick descriptions. Indeed, there is never enough specificity in the accounts

of two or more movements or struggles to guarantee an unproblematic translation among them."<sup>4</sup>

What this theorises is a failure to advance a political programme at all. It is because, for De Sousa, there can be no objective basis for determining political strategy – in an analysis of actual social relations – that he concludes that a uniform strategy is itself an impossibility. Such a position runs in total contradiction, not just to Marxist doctrine (one would expect this!) but to the actual experience of workers in struggle. Whenever class struggle intensifies and workers radicalize, far from just creating something new, they will want to look to analyse the past and the present in order to learn what political strategy may guide their own struggle, i.e. in order to generalise – to impose a uniformity.

In new language De Sousa is simply expressing a series of old and failed ideas. He starts with an idealist epistemology that leaves us in a relativist gloom – uncertain of what truth is. He continues by romanticizing the social struggles and adopting a populist *déclassé* approach. Then the very goal of human emancipation – a society based on genuine equality and freedom – is dispensed with for being just too "totalizing." What this leads to is classical reformism and one can see this in how postmodernist theory has been applied by the WSF leadership, to block the movement developing as a militant opposition to Lula's capitalist government.

## ENDNOTES

1 Marx and Engels, p.13, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels Selected Works, 1969, Lawrence and Wishart, London

2 *The Rise of the Global Left; The World Social Forum and Beyond*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos p11-12

3 *Can Law be Emancipatory?* Boaventura de Souza Santos

<http://www.geocities.com/relaju/souzasantos.htm>

4 *ibid*, p.38



# The resistible rise of German imperialism

*The Grand Coalition government of Chancellor Angela Merkel continues to press forward to the formation of a European imperialist bloc under the leadership of Germany and France. Here, Martin Suchanek looks at the threat of a resurgent imperialist power*

For German imperialism, the double presidency of the EU and of the G8 is both a major challenge and an opportunity. The government sees the coming months and years as a chance to improve Germany's standing as global imperialist power, by creating a strong bloc in the European Union under its joint leadership with France.

It does so against a backdrop of major cracks in US imperialism's hegemony, caused by the resistance of the Iraqi people, the defeat of the Israeli attack on Lebanon, and the coming to power of anti-US governments in Latin America, themselves the result of mass movements challenging imperialist rule of the continent. In other words, it does so at a time when the USA's capacity to block the further cohesion of the European Union is relatively limited, as Bush and co have to seek good terms with their "partners" in "old Europe".

In the following article, we will first present the major goals that the German EU and G8 presidency and government have set out for themselves in the coming period.

As we have stated repeatedly, Germany, France and other more minor continental powers in the European Union face major obstacles in building up a successful challenge to the US as an imperialist rival - not only on the economic, but also on the political and military fronts.

The European Union has already gone a long way towards creating a common market, a common currency, a common central bank, a whole range of transnational institutions, common borders, and a series of embryonic (and in some cases not so embryonic) European institutions to co-ordinate policy and to exercise powers usually associated with state institutions (European courts, police, Frontex, etc.)

However, whilst about two-thirds of all legislation in Germany is passed by European institutions, the EU is still far from being a homogeneous bloc. It remains a bloc of the major national states, a number of them long-standing imperialist powers, some minor imperialist countries and, particularly since the enlargement towards the East, a broad range of semi-colonies.

Certainly, the EU is not a pan-European federal state. However, Germany and France (backed by their closest allies in the EU, like Belgium) want to turn the EU into a homogeneous bloc under their leadership, where existing national bourgeoisies will "voluntarily" hand over formal state powers to the European institutions, which will remain dominated by the "great powers". The semi-colonies in Eastern Europe, of course, have little will and even less power to resist this drive. The major obstacles are the US and Britain. If the EU continues to cohere into a bloc able to challenge the US, a break with Britain - or a u-turn in British politics - will be on the agenda.

So there are a whole series of inter-related contradictions between the ruling classes, inside the ruling classes and between the major imperialist states in the EU which need to be overcome.

In the meantime, a more immediate and just as important question for Germany, France and their allies, like Italy, will be how to overcome the stalling of the EU project after the rejection of the constitution by the French and Dutch referendums, and how to ensure that the Franco-German "axis" will itself become more stable and more of a driving force.

Since the creation of the EU goes hand in hand with a massive drive to make the large European multinationals more competitive, premier league players on

the world market, there is a constant drive to boost productivity, as international competition sharpens.

The most obvious obstacle to this is resistance from the working class and the oppressed - against the neoliberal agenda of the EU; against the further attacks on bourgeois democratic rights; against the increased militarisation of the union; and against its racist character. The rejection of European constitution by large numbers of the population epitomises this resistance.

The German presidency quite consciously tries to address these problems of further imperialist bloc-building (albeit in less aggressive, "diplomatic" language), in its six-month plan, *Europe - succeeding together*. The plan falls into two major, interrelated parts:

- a) stabilisation and homogenisation of the EU itself under German/French hegemony
- b) increasing the competitiveness and strength of European capital and its formation.

## RENAMING THE CONSTITUTION

The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands has opened a deep political crisis across the European Union, and for French and German ambitions, in particular. The treaty had been presented as a major step to overcome the political weaknesses of the European Union, to create and legitimise pan-European institutions, to provide the framework for a common foreign and defence policy.

This included the creation of the post of EU foreign minister, the obligation of all member states to step up their military spending, and the further obligation of all member states not to come out against agreed EU policies and objectives. And it also included the reduction



of powers of individual states to block EU decisions, the abolition of veto previously afforded to each and every single members state, and it weighted the influence of each country within EU bodies according to its size.

Last but not least it delegated more executive powers and continuity to the "governing" institutions of the EU (e.g. Council of Ministers) and gave its constitutional blessing to already established institutions, like the European Central Bank, or treaties which regulated economic life, like the Maastricht treaty.

The German government, the EU commission and all the forces pushing for a stronger, more unified European imperialist bloc are well aware that simply to put the treaty on the agenda again is almost doomed to failure. That is why most of the German and French bourgeoisie sided with Nicolas Sarkozy in the French elections – at least on the question of the EU constitution. Ségolène Royal and François Bayou had promised to place the constitution before another referendum, whilst Sarkozy criticised such tactics as "adventurist". He proposed to focus on the actual content of the constitution being adopted, albeit in the less glorious form of a "treaty".

That is also the path the German presidency wants to follow. This shall be done via a series of consultations until June, when Angela Merkel and Frank-Walter Steinmeier will propose a plan for the further development of the European Union.

A major step towards this was the Declaration on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome, which was signed by EU ministers on 25 March 2007:

"With European unification a dream of earlier generations has become a reality. Our history reminds us that we must protect this for the good of future generations. For that reason we must always renew the political shape of Europe in keeping with the times. That is why today, 50 years after the signing of the Treaties of Rome, we are united in our aim of placing the European Union on a renewed common basis before the European Parliament elections in 2009."

Of course there exists the danger for the German government and its allies of getting its plan adopted in June, and then the successive presidency downgrading or even dumping it. This scenario reflects a more general problem of

the EU, that is, to ensure the continuity of an agreed common imperialist policy and strategy – an objective which the constitution tried to tackle.

However, the European imperialists have not just let time pass after their setback in May-June 2005. They have introduced a proviso, which shall ensure more continuity in their objectives. In September 2006 the Council of the European Union laid down the following in its amended Rules of Procedure: "Every 18 months, the three Presidencies due to hold office shall prepare, in close cooperation with the Commission, and after appropriate consultations, a draft programme of Council activities for that period."

Germany together with Portugal and Slovenia, the following two holders of the Presidency, therefore submitted a joint programme for the coming 18 months, drawn up in accordance with the Rules of Procedure to the General Affairs Council in December 2006:

"The aim of this cooperation is to enhance the continuity of the Council's work and to make the initiatives dealt with in the Council more sustainable. The central issues of the trio programme are the continuation of the EU's reform and constitutional process, implementation of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Employment, as well as further progress towards the completion of the European area of freedom, security and justice. Not least, our aim is to step up cooperation in the sphere of the European Union's joint action on foreign policy.

"As well as drafting the trio programme, the trio partners have also agreed to work closer together during the coming 18 months in order to foster the implementation of the joint aims and projects named. This applies in particular to issues which will be treated as priorities by all three Presidencies." ([http://www.eu2007.de/en/The\\_Council\\_Presidency/trio/index.html](http://www.eu2007.de/en/The_Council_Presidency/trio/index.html))

This enables German imperialism to determine the EU's agenda for 18, rather than six months. Portugal has a long tradition of close relations with German imperialism and often supported the Franco-German alliance in the EU. Slovenia is probably the East European state most closely allied to and heavily dominated by German capital and its political advisors.

Just as the German and other



Angela Merkel

European imperialists have responded to the rejection of the EU constitution with this provisional arrangement to strengthen the building of the EU, so have they progressed in a similar way on the questions of foreign and defence policy. The EU has started to play a more pro-active role in international political affairs. It is – together with Russia, the United Nations and the US – a recognised "partner" in the Middle East "peace" talks. Since the appointment of the EU secretary of foreign affairs, Javier Solana, the EU has gradually stepped up to become a much more interventionist force on the world stage.

This was demonstrated both in Congo in 2006, where the United Nations mandated the EU to oversee the democratic character of the election (i.e. to fraudulently place office its chosen local ally, Joseph Kabila, in office) and by the fact that the EU has taken over the mandates of occupation in Kosovo, Bosnia and Macedonia. The latter is of strategic importance to the further strengthening and stabilisation of the EU under German/French hegemony. No wonder, that solving the question of "Western Balkans" is a major objective the German presidency has set for the 18 months:

"Within the European neighbourhood the main focus of the Presidency's commitment will be on stabilising the Western Balkans in accordance with the European Security Strategy adopted by the European Council on 12 December 2003, particularly by supporting the Kosovo status negotiations or implementing the outcome if an agreement has been reached by then. To achieve this the EU will conduct its largest civilian



European Security and Defence Policy mission to date, concentrating on justice and the police.

"The stabilisation of the Balkans depends heavily on upholding and concretising the prospect of EU accession through the stabilisation and association process, while adhering strictly to the criteria of the Commission's four-stage plan and taking account of the EU's capacity to absorb new members. This applies particularly to Serbia in view of the expected political change in Kosovo and Montenegro's attainment of independence. The negotiations on the EU's Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina could be concluded during Germany's Presidency." (Programme of the Presidency, p21, [www.eu2007.de](http://www.eu2007.de))

The reason for this prioritisation is clear. German imperialism hopes to use the current conjuncture to "order" the Balkans in its own interests, and reduce US (and Russian) influence in the region. Behind this lies the whole recognition that Eastern Europe – EU enlargement – provides German capital in particular with a semi-colonial area of more than 100 million people, an important market for German goods, a central area for investment and takeovers by German companies, and a huge labour market of relatively cheap and well trained workers.

The other area where the European Union has made important steps forward in building a more homogeneous bloc, which is also capable to act as an imperialist power, is the military front. In the "European Defence Paper", the European Union has set out and, to a large extent, put in place a number of multinational intervention forces – a 60,000-strong rapid deployment force and 12-14 smaller so-called "battle groups" of around 1500 each.

The German army – built up as an army for a land war against the Soviet Union – has been restructured according to these needs. Today, there are also 10,000 German army, navy and air force troops operating as an integral part of the occupations of Afghanistan, Lebanon and the Balkans, taking part in the "war against terrorism" on the Horn of Africa, or acting as military advisors to the Ethiopian regime.

In its recent defence plan, the German government set out to build up an intervention force of up to 100,000 troops that can be deployed at any one time,

35,000 so-called intervention forces or "peace enforcements", as German imperialist call wars nowadays, plus 70,000 "stabilising" troops for operations of "middle or low intensity". Obviously, it will take some time – not to mention a fight – to turn these plans into reality. But there is no doubt that the German government – and the ruling class it governs for – will try to quicken the tempo on this front.

Accompanying the militarisation of the EU goes the concerted policy to support Europe's military industry. This has been pushed forward by the creation of the "European Defence Agency" in 2004. Its task is to co-ordinate military projects throughout the EU, to subsidise European research and investment in major military projects, and to assist the export of arms. The latter is certainly very successful, since, according to the Stockholm-based research institute, SIPRI, the EU became the largest exporter of arms in 2005 and 2006.

Despite this overt building up of the EU's military capacities, a clear sign of it trying to bridge the gap with the US, Merkel's government is often considered pro-American. Sarkozy likewise is portrayed as an Atlanticist. However, particularly with regard to Germany, one must not get carried away by journalists' rhetoric.

Of course, there is a certain break with Gerhard Schröder's (and for that matter Jacques Chirac's) policy when the Iraq war started. Schröder and his government openly rejected participation in the war – even though they, just like Chirac and the French government, did nothing to inhibit the US and British war machine.

However, the German government under Schröder declared a "strategic partnership" with Russia, a major objective of German and, as far as it is possible, EU policy. At the same time, foreign minister Joschka Fischer tried to "inspire" the formation of the EU by talk about the core of Europe, a Europe of "two tempos" – which, rather than inspiring anyone, led to much suspicion about Germany's own interests. Compared to this the Merkel government is remarkably "non-visionary" and pragmatic and the US is again portrayed as the "closest ally" and "friend".

However, this policy goes hand in hand with a quite "business-like" pursuit of real goals. The enormous influence

and control over East European economies by German capital and, increasingly, the politics of these states by German imperialism has continued to grow, without much need for spelling it out à la Fischer. Indeed, the remarkable fact is that Merkel has come out from time to time much more openly about Germany and the EU's mid to long term goals, without facing any quarrel from the US or other imperialist rivals. For example, at the end of March, Merkel spoke of the need to "create a European army" in the tabloid Bild-Zeitung.

In fact, there is a strong continuity running through German imperialist policy from the early 1990s onwards, which should not be overlooked. Merkel is following the same line of march as Schröder's government, not least in her choice of foreign minister, Steinmeier. He was already a member of Schröder's government, a state secretary in the Chancellor's office, and one of Schröder's key foreign policy advisors. Schröder himself is far from out of the picture, either. He sits, as chairman, on the supervisory board of Russian giant, Gazprom, which itself has close links with German multinationals, such as BASF and E.ON, and banks (who are the major suppliers of credit for the Russian gas and oil giants).

Whilst Merkel has half-distanced herself from her predecessors' Russophilia and is not openly pursuing the policy of "strategic partnership" (in order to calm the worries of Poland and other Eastern European states), the question of relations with Russia remains a central one for German imperialism.

The fact that rivalry between the US and the EU's core powers, France and Germany, has not abated, can be seen from a different angle as well. The US push to station Nato missiles in the Czech republic and other Eastern European states, whilst not officially directed against Russia, obviously also has the objective of spoiling EU-Russian relations and of making the formation of a future German/French/Russian alliance more difficult.

It is obviously in the USA's interests to keep a foothold in the European Union. However, if the German and French governments and their closest allies in the EU succeed in getting the essential elements of the constitution back on track, the major conflict they are heading towards is one with British imperialism.



The current role that Britain plays is to balance between the US and the EU, to benefit from its position in between the two power blocs. It is sustainable only because of the fact that, before French and German imperialism can successfully transform the EU into an imperialist bloc, their project will face further internal obstacles. The French rejection of the constitution, for example, allowed Blair to manoeuvre around questions like the constitution and the Euro quite successfully.

But the more the EU overcomes such problems, and the more British imperialism loses allies within the EU, the more the British capitalists will be put to a choice between the EU and the US.

## SELLING THE CONSTITUTION

The rejection of the draft constitution in France and the Netherlands, and the widespread discontent those votes expressed have led to another major shift in policy by the German government and, indeed, in a number of other countries.

Helmut Kohl and Schröder always tried to push through European treaties, such as Maastricht, the introduction of the Euro, or the constitution with as little public debate as possible. After the French Non, the German government and many other major imperialist strategists in Europe recognised that a "European imperialism" under their leadership also needs the backing not just from the ruling élite, but also from sections of the petit-bourgeoisie, the middle strata, and substantial parts of the working class, i.e. the broader masses of society.

This approach can be illustrated by a speech of German foreign minister Steinmeier at the conference on Europe of the socialist fraction in the European parliament on the 6 November 2006:

"In China, India, Russia, as well as central Asia and Latin America, approximately three billion people are on their way to acquiring a similar level of prosperity to that which we and the entire western world enjoys – naturally, the same is true in the Islamic world. (...) The fight for ever scarcer raw materials and resources makes the possibility for conflict substantial. (...) Global competition... threatens European social standards... what are our answers to it, ladies and gentlemen? First of all, I believe we

must work on our internal strength, in particular. And this has, at the same time, also an impact on foreign policy. Because I am firmly convinced that Europe can only become and then remain a force for peace, if we put the appropriate political, economic and – within limits – also military might on the scales."

Here one can see a number of the major elements that Germany has hyped onto the agenda of the European Union through a massive public campaign over the last months. At the EU summit held in Berlin, hundreds of thousands of small information pamphlets were distributed to the people, presenting the EU as an area of peace, cooperation and relatively high social security (our "social standards") in an increasingly brutal world.

These gains, the story goes on, are under threat – not, in the first place by the German, French and other European capitalists, but by the poor and impoverished world outside of Europe and by the US which has no "social standard" and does not keep peace. This is why Europe's borders need to be sealed off and migration "regulated" (i.e. racist laws be hardened), and therefore "we" must take part in the war on terror, but in a "reasonable", "European", not an American way. In order to maintain peace and its role as a "force for peace", Europe, Steinmeier concludes, has to arm itself.

For these goals, the German government and the European imperialists insist, the working class and the poor in Europe have to pay a certain price, an endless series of "reforms". But, Merkel, Sarkozy and the others promise, they are worth it, since they are there to preserve European "social standards" and to keep manufacturing jobs in Europe, by making them more competitive, by increasing productivity by deregulating workplace regimes and extending the amount of time spent at work.

## ATTACKS ON JOBS, WAGES, CONDITIONS

The truth of the matter is very different. For the working class, there is no light at the end of the tunnel of neoliberal reforms in Europe in sight.

In order to strengthen the EU's role as an economic power, the European council of minister agreed the so-called Lisbon agenda in March 2000. This has served as the "textbook" for a number of

neoliberal attacks by the European Commission and by the governments of member states, e.g. the Bolkestein directive to deregulate jobs in the service sector, or Agenda 2010 in Germany. The declared objective of the Lisbon agenda was to make the European Union the largest, most dynamic and strongest economic area by 2010.

Obviously, the union is far from having achieved this aim. No wonder that the German presidency calls for more neoliberal attacks: further marketisation in more branches of industry, further privatisation of public services (postal services, education, health, pensions, water and communications), removing obstacles for the centralisation of capital across borders. Further flexibilisation of the labour market – or, as the bourgeois newspeak calls it, "increasing employees' mobility" – is the other side of the coin of these developments, even if it is hidden behind a smokescreen about the "social component" of the EU.

These policies signal a continuation of the attacks already launched in previous years on the existing gains and safeguards for the working class: attacks on legal protections against redundancies, so-called "hire and fire", attempts to extend the working day, like Sarkozy's plan to abolish the maximum 35 hour week in France, pushing up the age of retirement, as carried out by the German government at the beginning of year.

All these measures aim to further increase the rate of exploitation across the European Union, primarily by increasing the production of absolute surplus value, i.e. increasing the amount of time the worker has to labour, rather than the amount of value the worker can produce in a given amount of time.

At the same time, the European Union supports measures aimed at reducing transaction costs (and thereby aiming to counter the increase of the organic composition of capital), measures to shorten the turn-over time of capital, etc. These policies are designed to boost the rate of profit for the bosses.

## MONOPOLISATION IN EUROPE

However, there is something about how Steinmeier, Merkel and others present the European Union, which may allow for a certain integration of sections of the labour aristocracy and the labour bureaucracy into an essentially social-

**The German presidency calls for more neoliberal attacks: further marketisation in more branches of industry, further privatisation of public services**



chauvinist project.

Thatcherism in Britain led not only to the wholesale shredding of workers' rights and a strategic defeat for the Labour movement, but also to a massive destruction of British industry. The German and French imperialists, on the other contrary, want to raise the rate of exploitation, and destroy a whole raft of workers' rights, while keeping core parts of European industry intact. This economic base they consider to be strategic for their objective of becoming a world power. They also hope that it could provide a safe haven, if a severe crisis hits the world economy, or if the current co-operation between the imperialist blocs break down.

Increasing competitiveness goes hand in hand with a conscious policy to facilitate the creation of European monopolies or to defend and improve their global positions.

At the end of 2005 177 of the largest 500 companies of the world – with a turnover of 40 per cent of the top 500 – were based in countries of the EU (189 were located in the Nafta region, 70 in Japan). However, this impressive number of European multinationals has to be balanced against the fragility of the EU bloc. Apart from some important exceptions, like EADS, we speak of large multinational capitals rooted in one particular European state, not simply of a "European capital".

In order to create of a truly pan-European capitalism, existing large scale companies in the major imperialist countries will be assisted to become "European" and "global" champions in their respective branches of industry. This will not simply be done via market take-overs, but will be promoted and directed by the EU, with mutual agreement worked out by the most important imperialist states. One can see the fault lines in the EU quite clearly, if one looks at the conflicts around the take-over of Spanish Edessa (energy and water), or at the difficulties balancing French and German interests in EADS.

In addition, the "opening" of the markets has to be done in such a way as to ensure that US capital and funds will not block the creation of European monopolies, and that the lion's share of take-overs of privatised public services in Eastern Europe will aggrandise Western European companies.

The German government quite openly



Workers from a DaimlerChrysler plant on strike

addresses this problem in its EU plan by extending working groups, and starting to impose policies to promote and subsidise the European industries based on "technologies of the future"; which happen to be existing central parts of European capitals, such as the car, rail, aircraft and aerospace industries. A major emphasis is placed on "securing European supplies of raw materials" and natural resources in an "energy dialogue" with Russia and the US.

This very same agenda will also be at the centre of the G8: the securing of energy resources and "sustainability" as a contribution to addressing climate change, the further opening of markets in the Third World as way to "help the poor" by stimulating investment.

### THE EU AND "SOCIAL EUROPE"

As we have said above, in order to push the formation of an imperialist bloc forward, the imperialist governments have to promote European Union. And they increasingly do so – for example, by taking up some of the criticism of the European Union, like the bloodless and bureaucratic character of Brussels, as if the much larger and powerful state apparatuses in Berlin, Paris or anywhere else were more "caring".

In the popular propaganda promoted by the European governments and the EU, the imperialist bloc is presented as a haven of peace on an increasingly barbaric planet. The EU and its predecessors are presented as if they secured peace,

social security and wellbeing for more than half a century. The pamphlets that were distributed in the streets of Berlin during the EU summit finished thus:

"In 1957 a new Europe was born with the 'European treaties'. It was the birth of the European Union. It is a big gain for us Germans:

1Never before in European history has there been such a long lasting period of peace. For 50 years the members states of the European Union have solved conflicts with peaceful means. Peace – this is our biggest gain.

1Without the EU we would not be the world's leading exporter. We export commodities worth of 500 billion Euros to other EU states. This maintains millions of jobs.

1Without the EU many things would be more expensive. For example, because of competition in the EU, telephone calls are cheaper than ever.

1Without the EU, education, studying and working abroad would be much more complicated. A Europe without frontiers offers fantastic possibilities, particularly for young people."

The cold war against the Soviet Union and the other degenerated workers' states, the support for the Vietnam war, the aggressive arms race inaugurated by Nato against the Warsaw pact... all "peace enforcement" missions? Plus the war against Yugoslavia, just eight years ago, not a European war? The European states were not been so "peaceful", when the British and Spanish states forcefully denied the right to self-determination to



the Basque and Irish people.

German capital, the "export" champion of Europe, has achieved this accolade on the back of the massive exploitation of an ever leaner workforce, and the appropriation of huge super-profits from the Eastern Europe and the Third World. Prices got cheaper (if at all) mainly by "cheapening" labour costs, slashing our wages and worsening our conditions, whilst the large private companies still garner huge monopoly profits in energy, water and other industries.

The biggest joke is the "freedom of movement" which ends at the borders of fortress Europe, meaning deportation and possibly death for migrants from Africa and Asia. It conveniently allows for the super-exploitation of "illegal" migrants or workers from Eastern Europe, who are denied full access to the labour market.

The lies of the imperialists are obvious and easy to refute. Their strength, however, not only lies in the might of a state machine and the billionaire media celebrating these deceptions, and rewriting history in the interest of the ruling classes. They gain "credit", because they are echoed and backed by "enlightened" bourgeois public figures, backed by former left-wingers like Fischer or Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and, most importantly, by the reformist led labour movement, particularly in Germany.

The social democratic parties have often enough written the textbooks of the latest round of pro-EU propaganda. Similarly trade union leaders – and those of the German trade union federation, the DGB, in particular – argue the same line. In September 2006, the DGB presented a whole set of demands on the German EU presidency, which culminated in a call on the German government to "strengthen Europe within globalisation" and to "bring forward the adoption of the EU constitutional treaty" (DGB-Bundesvorstand, Anforderungen des DGB an die deutsche EU-Präsidentschaft, September 2006).

Their sole reservation is that the latter should be improved and the "European social model be strengthened." But apart from this the DGB is not worried about the EU. On the contrary: "within its borders the EU secures peace, democracy and citizens' rights as never before in European history". Faced with such an opposition, you don't really need supporters.

This act of betrayal, justifying the EU in a social chauvinist way and deceiving the working class of its real content, makes it easier for social democracy to sell EU to its social base. The maintenance of core industries in Europe and the creation of large monopolies across the continent also provide a material basis for a smaller, highly productive (and highly exploited and worse off) labour aristocracy.

All this is combined with an overt, virulent racism, as pushed by fascists and right wing bourgeois politicians like Sarkozy, or by the more or less "hidden" racism of mainstream bourgeois politics. Of course, this racism, too, has a purpose. The ruling class expects its attacks to meet with resistance. For them the crucial question is not, whether it will happen or not. It is, rather, whether they can isolate the struggles, be it of sections of industrial workers, or of the poor and marginalised, like the racially oppressed youth in the Parisian banlieues. The ruling class expects a fight, despite all its plans of incorporation and the renewal – expansion even – of corporatism on "new" terms, i.e. the diminishing of the political influence of trade union bureaucracy, and the extension of forms of workplace based "partnership" (Betriebsräte).

Therefore, all talk of a "social Europe" by European Social Forum leaders, e.g. Attac, is not only futile and utopian, it also plays in hands of imperialist bourgeoisie. Indeed it is as an ideological position that allows for the formation for popular frontist blocs, ranging from the liberal and social democratic sections of the bourgeoisie through to the mainstream reformist parties of the Second International and the former Stalinists of the European Left Party. The Prodi government and the Italian situation present a clear warning of a "model" the ruling class can use in other countries to derail resistance and to get backing to push through an imperialist constitutional treaty with a "European social model".

## OUR TASKS

Certainly, this shows that a major task for revolutionaries, communists and internationalists is to expose the reactionary, anti-working and social-chauvinist class character of the social democrats, the trade union bureaucracy, the European Left Party and their petit-

bourgeois ideologues, like those in Attac. It means exposing every form of class collaboration and any attempt to portray the imperialist states in the European Union a "lesser" evil to US imperialism.

The struggle against a nascent European imperialism under German and French dominance, however, must not mean counterposing to it a return to "independent" capitalist states. Such a policy only leads to subordination to a section of the national bourgeoisie. It is a reactionary, backward-looking answer to the development of European industry and trade, to the development of the productive forces.

The real point is that the unification of Europe under the rule of German, French and other smaller imperialisms can only be a reactionary unification. It can only mean a unification in order to jointly raise the rate of exploitation of their "own" working class and to subordinate the people of the semi-colonial countries in the EU and the people of the Third World. It will be the unity of thieves, joining against the exploited and oppressed, and against other thieves like the US, ultimately preparing for a re-division of the world between the imperialist powers.

All the attacks on the working class in Europe, the onslaught against democratic and social rights, the pre-emptive strikes against workers' resistance, the increasing repression in Europe – all are directed towards this goal.

Therefore the tasks of revolutionaries in Germany and in the European Union are threefold:

- Fighting and assisting in the building of co-ordinations of struggle against the attacks on the working class, against imperialist interventions, wars and occupations, and against the racist attacks on refugees and migrants.
- Presenting a clear alternative to the programme of the reformists and bureaucrats, a programme of transitional demands, linking the struggles against the capitalists' offensive to the struggle for a Socialist United States of Europe as part of the struggle for world revolution.
- Creating the political tools on the basis of such a programme: the struggle for a new workers' party in Germany and other European states, and the struggle for a new, fifth International, a new world party of socialist revolution.

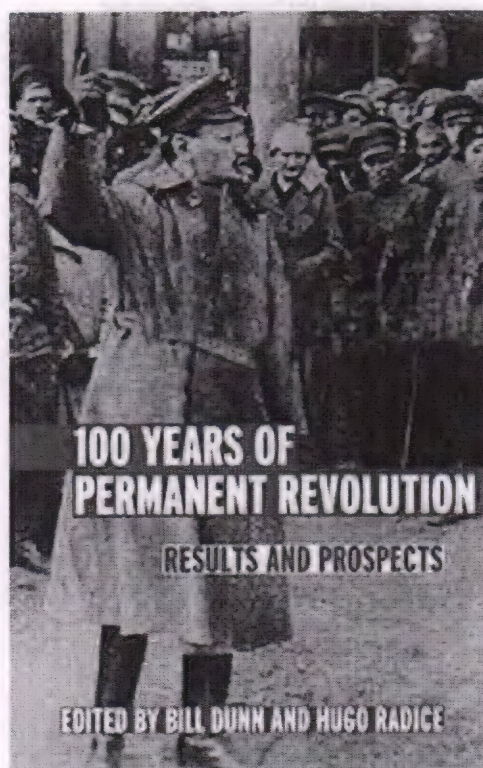


# 100 years on: the relevance of Permanent Revolution

*100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects* brings together a wide range of essays by academics, including non-aligned Marxists, as well as members of the Fourth International (FI) and International Socialist Tendency (IST). This collection marks, as the title suggests, the 100th anniversary of the publication of *Results and Prospects*, the work in which Trotsky first formulated the theory of permanent revolution. Its editors hope that it can contribute to the development of a "rejuvenated, anti-determinist Marxism, which can understand better not only the tumultuous 100 years, but also contemporary results and prospects" (Dunn and Radice: 9).

As this suggests, the essays focus heavily on the analytical method by which Trotsky developed his theory, which means that the authors only drop occasionally hints at what permanent revolution might look like today.

In the introductory essay, Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice, lecturers in political economy at Sydney and Leeds universities respectively, give a concise and unobjectionable summary of the theoretical premises and strategy of permanent revolution (p1-9). They point to the bold strategic proposal originally made by Trotsky to the Russian masses: to link the struggle against Tsarist autocracy with the fight for working class power, i.e. the formation of a workers' government (ibid). They outline how Trotsky conceived of the working class coming to the head of the democratic struggle in order to lead it, "uninterrupted", onto socialist tasks. In addition, they chart the development of Trotsky's own politics from the early 20th century to the Russian Revolution, immediately before which he joined the Bolsheviks. They also point to how, in the 1920s, Trotsky generalised the strategy of permanent revolution, applying it to the resistance to imperialism in the colonial world. They show that the



**Luke Cooper reviews *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*, edited by Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice, published by Pluto Press, 2006**

theory was lodged within an analysis of the uneven and combined character of world capitalism and the need for a global revolution, rather than the "socialism in one country" of Josef Stalin.

As Dunn and Radice also point out, an analysis of the uneven and combined character of global economic and political processes is timely given the plethora of discussion surrounding the contemporary "global economy". Indeed, the bulk of the essays in *100 Years of Permanent Revolution* deal with the question of uneven and combined development and what might be called the "political-economy of Permanent Revolution", i.e. the analysis of social, political and economic processes, which acted as the bedrock for Trotsky's revolutionary programme.

This narrow focus is the greatest weakness of the collection, as the questions of party, programme and tactics, were always essential to Trotsky. Dunn and Radice themselves state this, with reference to Trotsky joining the Bolsheviks in 1917: "While, it is only in 1917 that Trotsky accepts Lenin's organisational model, he was, from the beginning, advocating party policy, tactics, a means of achieving a particular, optimal outcome" (Dunn and Radice 2006: p08). However, Dunn himself, in his essay "Uneven and Combined Development as a Strategic Concept", does not broach the crucial questions of party, programme and class. Rather, he limits himself to a digression on the relationship between globalisation and the nation state, looking at the potential for an internationalisation of struggles, while pointing to the continued importance of nation states.

Useful as this is, it does not look at the vital strategic questions confronting the global social movements. This is despite Dunn and Radice pointing to the radicalisation of Chavez and the Zapatistas as



"new exciting forms" vis a vis old-style European social democracy (Dunn and Radice: p9). I dare say this is because they would find little in Trotsky's permanent revolution to theorise support for left bonapartists or peasant guerrilla movements respectively!

For Trotsky, achieving the permanence of the revolution necessitated the working class to fight for the leadership of the struggle for democracy and against colonialism; the smashing of the state (seen as an instrument of capitalist class rule); and the establishment of a working class state – based on soviets and defended by workers' militias.

Trotsky's generalisation of the theory of permanent revolution in the 1920s should be seen alongside the development of the other strategic discussions in the communist movement. In particular, the Communist International, prior to its Stalinist degeneration, developed the concept of transitional demands that link immediate struggles with the fight for working class power. In addition, it agreed a conception of a workers' government, which both allowed it to be placed as a demand on left reformism at heightened periods of struggle and made clear that only a government based on the power of the working class, which expropriated capital, could be described as a government of the workers.

Not one essay in the book fully outlines this position and certainly does not consider how it could be applied in the resistance to neoliberalism today.

In his contribution, Fourth International theorist Daniel Bensaid attempts to analyse the programmatic content of permanent revolution and link it to Trotsky's conception of the transitional programme. Vital as this is, as we noted in February, Bensaid establishes a concept of transitional demands that sees them as simply pragmatic responses to certain circumstances (Cooper 2007b). Bensaid argues that transitional demands were simply about mobilising the working class and educating it in Marxism and, with this understanding, he struggled to show how the transitional programme was different to the old "minimum-maximum" programme of pre-war social democracy. What was central to Trotsky's transitional programme, which gave it distinctiveness against the latter, was that it sought to turn day-to-day struggles of the working class into a fight for working class power, by fighting for workers to take

control of key elements of bourgeois society, e.g. working class control of production.

Bensaid's fellow comrade of the Fourth International, Michael Lowy, doesn't do any better. In the "The Marxism of Results and Prospects" (Lowy: p27-34), Lowy analyses the different trends within Marxism prior to 1917 and their view of the coming Revolution. The analysis focuses on how Trotsky had the most complete understanding of the tasks of Marxists in the coming revolution, against both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

The events of 1917 certainly acted as a powerful vindication of Trotsky's theory, and Lenin and the Bolsheviks had effectively gone over to the position of Trotsky. However, an uncritical account of Trotsky's politics prior to 1917, as Lowy gives, is equally erroneous because it ignores the small detail that Trotsky opposed the formation of the Bolsheviks, as a class independent party – advocating, as he did up until 1917, conciliation towards the Mensheviks. It was the fact that by 1917 the Bolsheviks had been built as a mass independent force, that they were able to successfully win the workers and soldiers councils to the task of seizing power.

Lowy's critique of the Bolsheviks and Lenin reaches the absurd when he argues, having correctly stressed the sophisticated dialectics present in *Results and Prospects*, that Lenin only discovered dialectics in 1917 – we need only point out Lenin wrote a book on dialectical materialism in 1908.

## UNEVEN AND COMBINED DEVELOPMENT

The book's saving grace is that it brings together a diverse range of essays debating uneven and combined development. This debate on the Marxist understanding of uneven and combined development has been a prominent one over the last few years. It has not only been given a lot of space in this volume but has also been the subject of debate at the last two conferences of the journal *Historical Materialism*. This debate has an importance beyond the academy (although there is certainly a danger of a purely doctrinaire exchange) in so far as it may contribute to a Marxist analysis of globalisation, which informs the perspective and strategy of communists. What follows is a short analysis of the competing approaches the book brings together.

In "From Uneven to Combined Development", Neil Davidson, author of the award winning *Discovering the Scottish Revolution 1692 – 1746* and member of the IST, looks at concepts of unevenness in early Enlightenment philosophy and the work of Marx. Davidson attempts to construct an argument that sees Marx making similar colonialist mistakes to early Enlightenment thought, particularly insofar as he argued that British colonisation of India was progressive in that it brought with it a superior mode of production (Davidson 2006a: 10-26). Davidson's argument is disingenuous, as in a number of writings Marx commented on the oppressive character of colonial expansion (Cooper 2007a). Nevertheless, Marx recognised how capitalism was developing and transforming mankind's productive forces on a world scale in a manner not seen in the whole history of humanity – indeed, there was a dramatic surge in technological and industrial progress throughout the 19th century (ibid).

This incorrect analysis of Marx, which downplays the contribution Marx made to the theory of uneven and combined development, leads to Davidson detaching the notion of combined development from the operation of the capitalist world market (Davidson: 22-23). Thus, he argues, combined development refers exclusively to the relationship between pre-capitalist and capitalist structures within a nation state (ibid: 23). This leads him to argue that in states, such as early 20th century Russia, the "archaic and the modern had melded and fused in all aspects of the social formations" (ibid: 22). In effect, this is a view of the relationship between the archaic and the modern, which sees them as mutually re-enforcing as opposed to recognising that the capitalist system, in all its universality and global patterns of integration, was the dominant component in the interchange, which both integrated and subordinated pre-capitalist elements into the global economy.

It is the systematic subordination and integration, i.e. unevenness, that Trotsky integrated into Marxist theory with his analysis. In doing so, he corrected the prevalent but one-sided interpretation of Marx which argued that capitalism was simply a universal system of linear social relations, i.e. simply combined, and was therefore able to show how it was the very universality of capitalism which led to it systematically reproducing uneven



and combined development.

The essay by Sam Ashman, who is also a member of the IST, has a lot to contribute to such a framework. He looks at how Marx's analysis of the world market in *Capital*, although it did not contain a fully developed theory of uneven development, did make a series of assumptions about the operation of unevenness (Ashman: p88-92). In particular, he argues that competition between different units of capital, with varying degrees of technological development and productivity, but whose behaviour is structured by the pressures of market competition, necessarily creates trends to equalisation and differentiation within the accumulation process (Ashman: p90-91). In this sense, Ashman is able to establish the operation of uneven and combined development as existing at the level of the lawful abstraction of capitalist laws and tendencies within Marx's *Capital*.

The essays from Colin Barker and Neil Smith, which we commented on in the last issue of *Fifth International* (Cooper 2006a), deal with the extent to which uneven and combined development can be understood as a social historical law. As we noticed previously, they both adopt equally wrong positions of seeing uneven and combined development as i) an ever present element in human development (Barker); or ii) rejecting, on the basis of empirical principle, the possibility of extrapolating laws of human development (Smith).

In this sense, the essay by Sam Ashman stands out in the book as contributing to a nuanced account of uneven and combined development, which sees it as specific to capitalism's universality and as a function of the capitalist accumulation process. As Ashman argues, implicitly against Smith, to merely cite certain "sociological generalisations" makes impossible an analysis of the "systematic mechanisms that generate and reproduce uneven development" (Ashman 2006: p96).

As a discussion of the theoretical premises with which we may approach the contemporary contradictions in global political economy, *100 Years of Permanent Revolution Results and Prospects* is not without interest. Indeed, developing a correct theoretical basis is critical in establishing an understanding of 21st century imperialism. However, the book, by not engaging with the strategic consequences of the competing

theories, certainly risks stimulating a purely doctrinaire exchange – and this should, at all costs, be resisted.

## ENDNOTES

- Referenced articles from *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*, published by Pluto Press, 2006, ed. Dunn and Radice
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- Davidson, 2006a, 'From Uneven to Combined Development', pp. 10-26
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- Barker, 2006, 'Beyond Trotsky: Extending Uneven and Combined Development', pp. 72- 87
- Smith, 2006, 'The Geography of Uneven Development', pp. 180 – 195
- Davidson, 2006b, 'China: Unevenness, Combination, Revolution?', pp. 211– 229
- Herod, 2006, 'Trotsky's Omission: Labour's Role in Combined and Uneven Development', pp. 152 – 165
- Bensaid, 2006, 'The Baggage of Exodus', pp. 61 – 71
- Lowy, 2006, 'The Marxism of [I]Results and Prospects[I]', pp. 27–34
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## Other References

- Cooper 2007a, 'Uneven and combined development: Marx, Trotsky and globalisation', *Fifth International*, Vol. 2, No. 2, February 2007
- Cooper 2007b, 'Daniel Bensaid and "The Return of Strategy"', [www.fifthinternational.org](http://www.fifthinternational.org)
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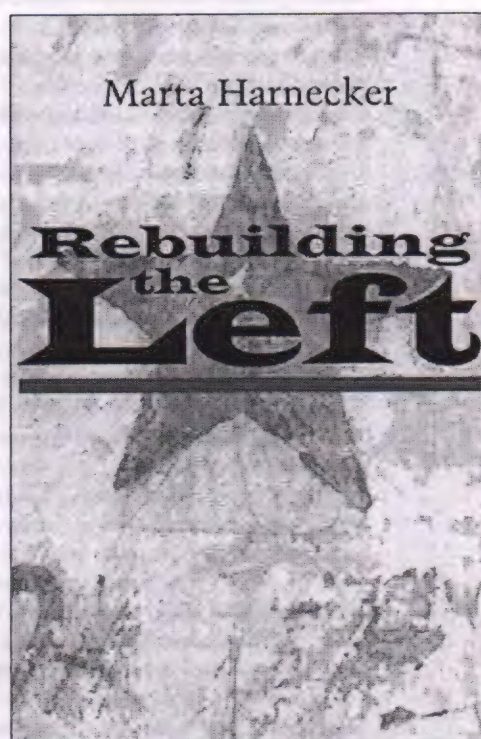
# Rebuilding the Latin American left

Andy York reviews *Rebuilding the Left* by Marta Harnecker, Zed Books, 2007

Marta Harnecker is a long time activist on the Latin American left. Originally from Chile, upon the overthrow of the left-wing government of Salvador Allende by General Pinochet in 1973 she went into exile in Cuba, where she runs the Memoria Popular Latinoamericana research institute. In her new book, *Rebuilding the Left*, she addresses the new movements against neoliberalism that have sprung up across the continent. Harnecker, like a number of left activists in the social movements, is a supporter of Hugo Chávez and the "Bolivarian Revolution". She works as an advisor to the Chávez government and her book can be seen as an attempt to theorise the new left politics she believes it expresses.

Harnecker sees her book as responding to what she calls a "crisis" in the Latin American left, whereby it is polarised between an increasingly neoliberal right wing and a woefully sectarian left. This is a result, she argues, of four decades of neoliberal globalisation marked by the failure of the left to establish a coherent, alternative economic and political project to the "Washington Consensus". However, she believes the Bolivarian Revolution offers a new, viable left project and she attempts to give it a theoretical foundation at the level of Marxist theory and sketch out a relatively universal political programme she hopes will be taken up elsewhere.

The effect of this is to give an Marxist gloss to the new populist reformist left in Latin America – its weaknesses are not subject to revolutionary critique by Harnecker but held up as a model for others to follow. In this extended review we make a critique of the theory and strategy Harnecker proposes. As we shall see, Harnecker openly propagates the idea that bourgeois institutions may be used as instruments of radical transformation, puts forward a programme based on a series of reformist demands and, perhaps worst of all, recycles the Stalinist theory of the popular front in new, more fashionable language.



## THE ANTI-NEOLIBERAL BLOC

Harnecker starts out with an analysis of the "new world" created by globalisation. The debt crisis in the 1980s led to government after government across Latin America caving into the demands of the USA and International Monetary Fund to open up their economies to international capital. In this period a number of unpopular dictators fell in several key countries and were replaced by bourgeois democratic governments that tended to converge around a pro-American, neoliberal economic programme.

Over time this led to widespread disillusionment in politicians, political institutions and, in particular, the acquiescence to neoliberalism of more traditional left populist parties. This created a political space to the left of them – one that became increasingly occupied by anti-neoliberal social movements. Harnecker rightly emphasises the necessity of any

socialist party worthy of the name to orient to these movements and seek to influence them politically.

In addition, Harnecker believes that neoliberal restructuring has done something altogether more profound than simply creating a new political space. She argues the classical working class has diminished in size and importance to be replaced by more heterogeneous forms of class structure à la Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's "multitude". They and Harnecker argue new popular forces, across a range of classes, have created a new social subject, expressed in the growth of social movements.

Harnecker argues for a popular politics she calls an "anti-neoliberal social and political bloc". For Harnecker this includes not just the urban and rural working class, the poor and unemployed, but also the "the impoverished middle strata, a constellation of owners of small and medium-sized businesses... professionals... the police and the lower ranks of the army". She criticises what she perceives to be the one-sided emphasis placed on the industrial working class by the traditional left and even goes as far as to argue that this bloc "could also include capitalist sectors whose business activity has entered into an objective contradiction with transnational capital".

It is Harnecker's error at the level of the political subject that leads to this populist outlook. Across the global south the uneven and combined development of capitalism means that industrial production often exists side by side with pre-capitalist and peripheral class structures. However, the importance of working class wage labourers (particularly those in the big companies) is that, when they withdraw their labour, capitalist production cannot continue and becomes threatened. To take Bolivia as an example, general strikes were crucial in shutting down the country and forcing out



presidents in 2003 and 2005.

It is certain that the working class will have to rally the urban poor and peasants to its programme and fight for their demands too – such as land for the peasants. However, the programme of Harnecker proposes something altogether different – unity with the “anti-imperialist” and “democratic” capitalist class in a classic popular front. This is not a new idea but, as Harnecker should know given her Stalinist background, one that was implemented with catastrophic effect in the crisis ridden 1930s. In Spain and France the workers dropped their socialist demands and revolutionary struggle for state power in order to side with their own exploiters and maintain the latter in power.

It is precisely because the class relationship between worker and boss is an antagonistic and exploitative one that they each have objectively different political programmes – one to develop a better environment for capitalist profit, the other fighting for the full socialisation of production under the control of the working class itself. It is because the weak semi-colonial bourgeoisie is too frightened of the potential power of its own working class to fight consistently for its own liberation, that the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky argued that the workers would have to lead democratic and anti-imperialist struggles, and in so doing lead uninterruptedly towards working class power and socialism – in a “permanent revolution”.

## PARTY AND PROGRAMME

Harnecker believes that a party is necessary for the “political subject... which would provide political direction to the class struggle” and the anti-neoliberal bloc. Interestingly, she argues for a democratic centralism – freedom in discussion and decisions but unity in action – and rejects “bureaucratic centralism”, which lacks democracy.<sup>3</sup> However, despite the Bolsheviks having just such a democratic centralist party, she goes on to criticise the Latin American left for an “acritical copying of the Bolshevik model of the party” arguing the need to get rid of the “theoretical underpinnings of this model”.<sup>4</sup>

In this spirit she argues for the loosening of party definitions of membership towards a libertarian-style “network-type of organisation”. This, she argues, would allow for members who only want to be active now and then e.g. around elections.

In addition, she argues that party members should be united around a “cultural communion of values” and lifestyle that rejects consumerism.<sup>5</sup> This means building an “authentic national culture” incorporating indigenous customs and rejecting imports such as Halloween and Disney!<sup>6</sup>

This all starts to look quite different from democratic centralism let alone the Russian Bolsheviks. Karl Marx, V.I. Lenin and Trotsky all argued that the essential building block of the party was not a nebulous set of cultural values but a political programme – which party members agreed to fight for as the key criterion of membership. The need for both democracy and centralism follows from this foundation.

Harnecker accuses Bolshevism of having a tendency to “workerism”, “hegemonism”, “vanguardism” – with the latter erroneously focused on overthrowing the capitalist state. Of these, the charge of workerism is the most interesting in that it forgets the Bolsheviks led a workers’ revolution in a country whose population was 80% made up of peasants! They were won to the side of the Bolsheviks by the promise of an Agrarian revolution.

What was essential for the Bolsheviks was that they saw themselves as fighting to win the Russian masses to their political programme – that is, leading them towards the goal of working class power. It is this that Harnecker ultimately rejects. She paints an idealised picture of diverse movements interacting autonomously within an anti-neoliberal bloc and ignores the fact that such movements will always have a political leadership and programme, even if this is concealed behind libertarian language.

Just as Harnecker takes democratic centralism and moulds it into something quite different, so too she takes up Lenin’s theory of socialist consciousness. Lenin argued, and Harnecker agrees, that socialist consciousness is brought into the working class “from without” by the party.<sup>7</sup> However, it is because Harnecker does not believe the party should fight for its socialist programme amongst the class that she turns socialist ideas into an abstract science, detached from working class struggles.

For Harnecker socialist consciousness is simply a critique of capitalism and “a proposal for an alternative society to do away with it”. This is true enough, but it tells you nothing about how revolutionary socialist consciousness can be concretised into a set of demands, which seek to turn

everyday struggles into a struggle for power. This is what Trotsky argued was the quintessence of the transitional programme. Harnecker, in contradistinction to Trotsky, is guilty of turning socialist consciousness into something that is disconnected from the actual struggles of workers. In short, she fails to see the revolutionary unity between theory and practice.

In presenting socialist consciousness in such abstract terms, Harnecker lays the basis for arguing for a minimum programme. She argues the task of the day is “designing a project that is an alternative to capitalism... a national alternative programme which acts as a glue for the most disparate popular sectors... the broadest spectrum of the masses” made up of broad goals or slogans that everyone agrees on. She admits that this is a “minimum programme”, i.e. a programme of reforms within capitalism that is forever severed from the “maximum programme” of socialist revolution. For all reformists, socialism is always a “nice idea for the future”, rather than something that must be fought for in every struggle of the working class and poor today.

## ‘MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE’

Harnecker does recognise that the party at some point needs a link, which can shift the struggles of today into the struggle for socialism and revolution: what she calls “the art of making the impossible possible”. For her the key transformative link is “popular participation governments” where the focus is “a way of governing which, above all, delegates power to the people”. Thus the Left is a party of government and party of struggle simultaneously.<sup>8</sup>

As an example of this process she chooses the participatory budgets pioneered by the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) in Porto Alegre, which she calls “the key to participation and politicisation”. The problem with these “participatory” institutions is that they are not actual instruments of popular power. The budgets and framework for decisions are always set at the discretion of government bureaucrats. This has led in Brazil to “participatory democracy” managing neoliberalism’s austerity budgets – choosing what to cut and what to save. One upshot of this has been playing off consumers against public sector workers. There have even been tripartite (cross-class) commissions of workers,



management and popular movements to try and make the workers more responsible, with the hope of turning them into "staunch allies for raising taxes and generally improving the municipality's revenues. As services improve, people will be more willing to pay taxes." Harnecker supports this and insists that popular assemblies that do not acknowledge the fiscal responsibilities of the new "Left" government and draw up a list of requests that exceed the municipality's ability to deliver, should be re-educated to recognise the present limits imposed by capitalism!<sup>9</sup>

In a few pages Harnecker has skillfully managed to redraft the arguments of the "reasonable" bourgeoisie in the language of Marxism. In doing so, she forgets that Marxists have a simple response to the pleas of bourgeois democratic states that they "can't afford" the workers' demands: take the money from the rich and big business, open the books of those who claim they can't afford the workers' demands, nationalise the big companies without compensation, and place them under working class control. This strategy seeks to turn the struggles for immediate demands, into the fight for socialism and Harnecker's "politicisation" goes in the opposite direction: asking the working class to scale down its demands!

Harnecker states that the social movements act like a "pressure group" for a Left government until we can "change the correlation of forces so we can make possible tomorrow what appears impossible at present".<sup>10</sup> She supports Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution and points to the Communal Councils Act passed on 9 April 2006 as creatively organising the community, along with various Misiones to teach self-management and extend cooperatives. She asks: "can we say that there is no revolutionary process in Venezuela when the popular sectors are transforming themselves into the true protagonists of history in that process and the government is creating the foundations for a new state that is built from below?"<sup>11</sup>

The popular mobilisation of the workers and poor in Venezuela offers a great opportunity for socialist revolution in the 21st century. The reforms of Chávez certainly appear to stand out in a period of neoliberalism as an economic alternative based on social justice and redistribution.<sup>12</sup> But is he laying the foundations for a new state? The situation in Venezuela is deep in contradictions.

Chávez lacks the support of much of the country's ruling class and continues to stand at the head of a state filled with conservative elements – in the police, army and judiciary – that want him out. The latter is why Chávez has established the Misiones et al outside the structures of the existing state, hoping they will act as a force to secure his own power in the event of a coup or putsch.<sup>13</sup>

In this situation the working class must struggle to complete the revolution – smash the bourgeois state, expropriate the capitalists and establish a new state based on working class democracy, like the soviets in Russia in 1905 and 1917. This means fighting for the working class to break with the capitalists and not constitute an "anti-neoliberal bloc" alongside them. It is telling that despite mentioning now and again in passing the word revolution, nowhere does she elaborate how a socialist revolution would come about from her long process of developing participatory democracy, what the revolution would look like, or how it would work.

## REFORMISM AND THE STATE

Marxists understand reformism as an ideology that argues socialism will be achieved through a series of parliamentary reforms. Attachment to parliamentary democracy is the chief characteristic of reformist parties, as they deny that the liberal democratic state is a facade that conceals the actual domination of capital. The permanent apparatus of the capitalist state – police, army, judiciary – will ultimately be harnessed in defence of capitalism when it finds itself threatened. There can be no parliamentary road to socialism, as a revolution is needed to smash the capitalist state and put power in the hands of the workers.

As Rosa Luxemburg argued, reformists therefore do not advocate a different route, but actually a different goal, as they argue for accommodation with the existing system. It is precisely because of their accommodation with the system that reformist parties will often become integrated into state structures and base themselves on more privileged sections of workers.

It would make sense then that to justify her political project Harnecker would revise the Marxist theory of reformism and the state – and sure enough this is what she does, although she denies it. Harnecker argues that "we are at the

beginning of a long process" and, by distinguishing between different "forms" of capitalist state, she hopes to show that Marxists believe the state can be used as an instrument for social transformation:

"This is why the Marxist distinction between the type of state and form of government is so important. The type of state responds to the question: whose interests (or the interests of which class) does this state serve? The form of government answers a different question: how are those interests served: through a dictatorial regime or through one of the many varieties of democratic regime? It is important to understand that when the classic texts refer to 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' they're thinking about a kind of state and not a form of government. Furthermore, they are thinking about the type of state in a developed capitalist society which is moving towards socialism... perhaps the best way to avoid confusion without renouncing the Marxist concept of the state (which maintains that the state is not neutral, but obeys the interests of a certain class) is to refer to a state where the bourgeoisie has hegemony or one where the people have hegemony."<sup>14</sup>

It is typical of Harnecker that she asserts a classical account of the state as an instrument of class rule in the abstract, only to then discard this foundation by asserting the primacy of different categories – namely, the "hegemony" of the people or not in both the form and type of state. It is self-evident that democratic structures and rights are progressive, particularly because they grant the working class freedom to organise and struggle. However, they also play an important role in disguising the oppressive and exploitative domination of capitalism and they bring together the privileged, coercive forces (police, army, judiciary) that will ultimately defend capitalism from overthrow. It is simply confused and inconsistent to claim, as Harnecker does, that the state expresses the interests of a certain class and may also, because of its "type", give the people hegemony.

In addition, Harnecker ignores the role of the capitalist state as a regulator of the market economy. This legitimising function of the state is reproduced in popular discourse on a daily basis. The primary responsibility of government is economic growth – whether the benefits accrue to the rich or not. Left reformist governments have to limit their pro-





Venezuelan UNT members have been at the forefront of the struggle for socialism

gramme to one that will not inhibit economic growth. To ask for the government not to "legitimise capitalism" is asking for a utopia – and sits uncomfortably with her appeal to workers to know the limits of capitalism!

Harnecker's whole political trajectory is orientated to the "democratic form" and this leads her to focus on participatory democratic structures that "supplement" the state – rather than the organs of working class democracy that can lay the basis for a new type of workers' state. This is why she makes the bourgeois institutions of democracy or state-led initiatives such as the Bolivarian circles the starting point for her "project of transformation", rather than the proto-soviet popular assemblies and co-ordinations such as the APPO in Oaxaca (Mexico) or the Fejuve in the El Alto water and gas "wars" (Bolivia).

In addition, the idea that there is a long process is clearly wrong. In Bolivia in 2003 and then 2005, a nation-wide general strike paralysed the country, uprisings in key cities expelled the armed forces and began to tear apart the discipline of the army, presidents were ousted, and the road was open for the masses to power. It was their leadership – with ideas much like those of Harnecker – that held them back and turned the masses towards a parliamentary road and

away from a final confrontation with capitalism itself.

Other examples are the Sandinista Revolution of 1979 or the long bloody stalemate of the FMLN in El Salvador throughout the 1980s. In both cases the Stalinists adopted a popular front strategy, based on an alliance with capitalist forces and left-wing elements of the Church, and refused to struggle for working class power. In these situations working class power was a real opportunity. However, it is Harnecker's reformist ideas that block her from seeing the revolutionary potential in these struggles and commit her to a "long process" – not only that, it is precisely such ideas that led to the failure of these struggles in the first place.

## RESIGNATION OR REVOLUTION?

In *Rebuilding the Left* Harnecker has not broken with the fundamental assumptions of 20th century Stalinism: namely, that the revolution should proceed in "stages", first with the popular front, then with social reform, and some time later, we might hope, socialism itself.

She does not learn the key lessons of the Latin American left in the last fifty years. In the struggles led by the Stalinist guerrilla popular fronts in El Salvador and Nicaragua, the Allende government

and today with Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution, she adopts the same popular frontist, stagist strategy. Thus, her answer to why the struggles of the last fifty years did not realise global revolution and socialism, is that it simply wasn't possible; such were the external pressures and dynamics.

In an earlier work she elaborates her support for the popular front strategy, stating that one of the great successes of the FMLN in El Salvador and of the Nicaraguan Sandinista regime was receiving (token) support from European imperialism against the US counter-revolutionary repression.<sup>15</sup> This "impossibility" of revolution stretches at least as far back as her first and formative experience of a revolutionary situation, under the Allende government in Chile in the early 1970s, where she states, "the leadership of Popular Unity Coalition and President Allende himself understood quite well that the Chilean process could not succeed without the support of the armed forces."<sup>16</sup>

It is because Harnecker divorces theory from revolutionary practice and strategy, that her answers to why these revolutions failed are ultimately objectivist and empirical. Her method focuses on an empirical analysis of a particular state or regime, the constraints of capitalist social relations and the pressures of the imperialist world system – to conclude that the "balance of power" was not for revolutionary change. As Trotsky noted, if those preaching the "balance of power" thesis in Russia 1917 had won the day, there would have been no revolution.<sup>17</sup>

Harnecker's approach is not only reformist, but also tails the politics of those forces leading struggles in Latin America in the last fifty years, such as Allende, the Sandinistas, Chávez, and the Zapatistas. It is because she tails the politics each of these forces opportunistically, rather than subjecting them to criticism, that her conception of "the Left" is highly nebulous. It is for her a catch-all term including neoliberal governments such as Lula in Brazil right through to guerrilla movements in armed struggle like the FARC in Colombia. Harnecker is able to group these together because she does not analyse the political forces systematically, classify them by their different programmes or analyse their actual successes or failures.

This means she cannot draw balance sheet of the historical errors and defeats of the Latin American left, vital to



informing revolutionary strategy today. Her own reformist politics stand in the way of this. The effect of this is ultimately a fatalistic attitude to the defeats of the last fifty years – appealing to the “balance of forces” as an excuse for the failure of reformist and Stalinist leaderships to lead a conquest of power. The effect of this, we argue, is that for Harnecker “making the impossible possible” has never been... well... possible.

## CONCLUSION

In *Rebuilding the Left*, Marta Harnecker poses as a Marxist but her account is an attack on the core foundations of Marxist theory and practice: the centrality of the working class, the struggle for power, revolutionary programme and class independence are all dispensed with.

It is telling that her book is filled with references to non-Marxists such as Hardt and Negri, Stalinist writers like Ché Guevara and Fidel Castro, nationalist figures like José Martí, and an eclectic mix of academics, writers and activists. In a process of selective quoting she seeks to give a Marxist gloss to prevalent, muddle-headed reformist ideas. It is equally telling that the revolutionary activist and thinker who developed key aspects of the Communist programme in struggle with Stalinism, Leon Trotsky, does not get a look in!

The problem with the Latin American left is not that it does not adhere to Harnecker's ideas but rather that it fundamentally always has and still does. We believe that a serious critique of the methods and programme of Stalinism<sup>18</sup> is essential in opening the road to the re-elaboration of a revolutionary programme and a prerequisite for rebuilding revolutionary parties around the world as part of a revolutionary International.

This is an urgent necessity if the new, vibrant movements that have arisen across the Latin American continent are to succeed in creating a Socialist United States of Latin America.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 pp32, 44 in “Rebuilding the Left”, Marta Harnecker, Zed Books 2007
- 2 p35, Harnecker
- 3 p46, Harnecker
- 4 p2, Harnecker
- 5 p100, Harnecker
- 6 pp98, 103, Harnecker

7 p. 29, “What Is To Be Done?”, Lenin, Progress Publishers 1978. For a critique of a typical left rejection of this and defence of Lenin's idea, see “What is to be done? the question economism can't answer” p. 30 in “The Politics of the Socialist Workers Party: A Trotskyist Critique” by Workers Power; available online at <http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=105,539,0,0,1,0>

8 p. 135, Harnecker

9 pp. 123-6, Harnecker

10 p. 69, Harnecker

11 p. 151, Harnecker

12 It should also be noted that the reforms are only sustained or “affordable” for the domestic capitalist economy because of the high price of oil in the global market and Venezuela's large oil reserves (the fourth largest globally).

13 For an account of Chavez and his popular initiatives including the communal councils, see “Hugo Chavez: Leading a Socialist Revolution?” by Simon Hardy, in Fifth International Volume 2, Issue 2, Winter 2007; available online at <http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=37,983,0,0,1,0>

14 p. 96, Harnecker

15 For an alternative account of the limits and betrayals of the Sandinistas in power, see “Nicaragua under the Sandinistas”. Permanent Revolution 7, Spring 1988; available online at <http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=5,248,0,0,1,0>

16 *ibid*, p24

17 The Lessons of October, Leon Trotsky - <http://www.marxist.com/classics/trotsky/lessonsoct.html>

18 The Degenerated Revolution: the origin and nature of the Stalinist States: available at <http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=86,564,0,0,1,0>



# Politics, the party and the unions

**Jeremy Dewar** reviews *Ramparts of resistance: why workers lost their power and how to get it back*, Sheila Cohen, Pluto Press, London, 2006, 248pp

In *Ramparts of resistance*, Sheila Cohen, an academic and activist in the trade union movement, presents a brief, comparative survey of union struggles in the USA and Britain from 1968 till the present day. In the final third of the book, Cohen draws her own lessons, negative as well as positive, from this experience and, on the basis of this analysis, puts forward a set of principles for trade union renewal.

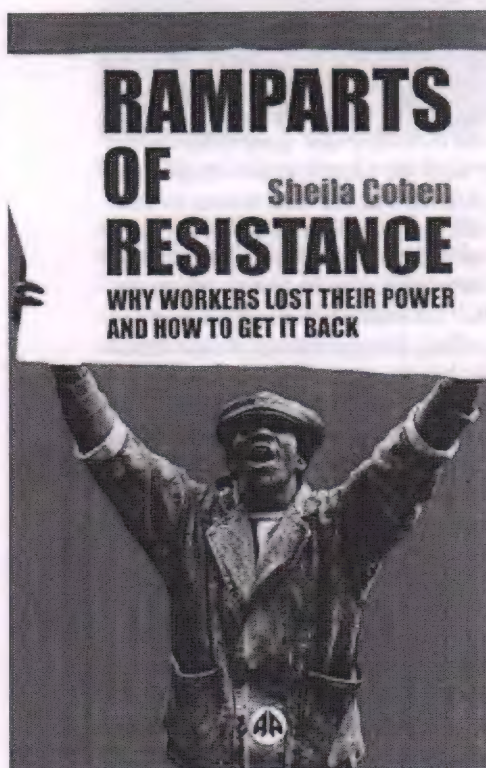
Such a project should be useful. A study of workers' organisations in the two most neoliberalised countries in the world could reveal not only the way forward for workers and socialists in these countries, but provide a timely warning to activists in other countries of how neoliberalism defeated the unions and how they could have avoided those defeats.

Unfortunately, Cohen's book does not provide answers to these questions. On the contrary, she is so selective in her examination and flawed in her diagnosis that to follow her prescriptions would simply lead militants to repeat the errors of the past.

## A SYNDICALIST TALE

On the very first page, Cohen asserts that "the main threat to ruling class demands and strategies has come, time after time, not from lofty political protest but from 'raw', workplace based, rank and file resistance" (p1). The first two-thirds of the book describe such acts of resistance. And entertaining, inspiring and thought-provoking they are. The point of this review is not to belittle workers' struggles – despite Cohen's unsubstantiated claims that the far left stands aloof from them.

Cohen agrees with Lenin that workers cannot achieve full, political class consciousness through their own experience alone; that a struggle against a single employer or within a single industry has to be transformed into a struggle against the whole capitalist class and to overthrow capitalism in order for workers to be acting as a class-for-itself.



Correctly observing that reformism is the spontaneous ideology of the working class, seemingly backed up by its experience of the wages contract (a fair day's pay for a fair day's work), and not something foisted on workers by trade union leaders, Cohen asserts that workers can transcend this hegemonic ideology "occasionally and in flashes" only through their own experience.

But that is as far as her 'Leninism' goes. For her such a transformation must nevertheless start from the economic struggle itself and nowhere else. So called "middle class radicals" and the "revolutionary left" – Cohen uses the two terms indiscriminately – are berated for trying to bring a "broader" political agenda to the workers. Anything extraneous to the economic struggle, which does not emerge organically from it, tends to divert workers from organising workplace resistance.

Consciously echoing Antonio Gramsci, Cohen argues that "purely industrial struggle can generate a 'philosophy' among workers which approaches (and probably surpasses, in terms of its grounded 'common sense') that of the most coherent intellectuals".

Central to Cohen's thesis is the layer of shop stewards. Their shared experience with the workers prevents them from accommodating to the union bureaucracy or the employers. The relationship between shop steward and members – "direct democracy" – is complex and dynamic. It provided a constant point of pressure on the workplace representatives to resist, while joint shop stewards' committees and combines brought a broader, industry-wide or even class-wide perspective to the workforce.

The employers identified the danger and attacked it. On the one hand, they gave the stewards facility time, offices and secretarial support; they moved the function of the bureaucracy down the foodchain. On the other hand, they



introduced quality circles and teamworking to give workers the illusion that they could influence how the workplace was run and deal with their grievances directly. All the while leaving ownership and the profits in the bosses' hands.

Shop steward density fell dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s, as did membership. How to revive the unions has since then become the key question.

The most dynamic section of trade union officials has afforded a role for the workplace rep in re-building the unions. John Sweeney and Andy Stern have developed a strategy of "bureaucratic militancy" and "community unionism". Mobilising the community through civil disobedience – in the Justice for Janitors campaign, for example – was, in the hands of Sweeney and Stern, means to an end: but that end was more of the same, "partnership" with the employers.

Cohen counterposes to this rank and file militancy, direct democracy and a cross-union, class-wide rank and file movement. The goal of this movement is to build up unofficial and semi-official committees, which, at their height, can become like soviets. But to achieve this, the militants must only develop organisations that come directly out of their economic struggles; they must only base themselves on economic struggles, which can become "transitional" to socialism when capitalism is unable to concede the workers' demands; in this sense only will their struggles become anti-capitalist and therefore political.

## MARXISM AND THE TRADE UNIONS

Sheila Cohen is not shy of Marxism. But she does not start from the basic Marxist understanding of the trade unions. Trade unions are contradictory organisations. They perform an essential function within capitalism, enabling the worker to sell her or his labour power at a price that enables it to be reproduced, to bring up the next generation of workers and look after themselves in retirement. This is the basis the workers economic struggle. But because workers must seek the maximum strength in their united numbers, to face the much more concentrated economic force of capital there is a tendency for this to spread from sections to industries and across industries. For this reason they are "schools for socialism", organs of embryonic class struggle. As Cohen herself points out, the slogan of trade unionism, be it militant or yellow,

is "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work". This acceptance of the wages system led Lenin to call pure and simple trade unionism a bourgeois ideology.

This explains the limits of trade unionism. Trade unions cannot, on their own, overthrow the capitalist system, even if they can thwart the capitalist class's plans and indeed precipitate revolutionary crises. They tend to be less effective during serious economic downturns because the increased supply of, and lowered demand for labour power weakens its position in the market. These two facts also explain why trade unions tend to repeat the same battles over and over again; what was gained today, the bosses will try to take back again tomorrow.

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels also observed that the trade unions, by their nature, recruited both too broadly and too narrowly from the working class for them to become the leading instrument for self-emancipation. Workers of all political persuasions and of none should be swept into the unions. Even reactionary or backward workers should be welcomed into the unions, since strikes need to be solid. But this makes them particularly unsuitable for the task of preparing for and leading a revolution, i.e. overthrowing capitalism.

On the other hand they are too narrow because unions are most effective for skilled workers, whose labour power is in relatively short supply, and least effective for unskilled workers, often women, youth and migrants, who tend to be among the least secure and lowest paid. They cannot represent the whole of the working class: virtually nowhere have trade unions for long organised over 50 percent of the working class. They thus have an inherent tendency to over-represent the labour aristocracy.

This provides the material basis for a bureaucratic caste of trade union officials. It is not simply that different sectors of workers' limited experience and the wage-labour form "spontaneously" gives rise to a reformist ideology. The labour aristocracy enjoys a lifestyle similar to the petit bourgeoisie, benefits from part of the surplus value extracted from workers in the third world, and seeks to protect its social position not only from attacks from above, the ruling class, but also from below, the mass of the working class, via restrictions on entry to its trades and so on. This explains the caste rather than class outlook of the bureaucracy, which binds the left and right

wings together.

While Rosa Luxemburg and V.I. Lenin disagreed on the material underpinnings of trade union officialdom, it was Luxemburg, who first pointed to the importance of the rank and file of the unions, the key to unlocking the full potential of the trade unions and winning them to revolution.

"To desire the unity of [party and union] through the union of the party executive and the general commission [i.e. leadership of the trade unions] is to desire to build a bridge at the very spot where the distance is greater and the crossing more difficult. Not above, amongst the heads of the leading directing organisations and in their federative alliance, but below, amongst the organised proletarian masses, lies the guarantee of the real unity of the labour movement."<sup>2</sup>

Cohen specifically attacks Lenin's *What is to be done* for declaring that revolutionary class consciousness has to be brought into the trade unions from the outside. She produces a few quotes to support her claim that Lenin thought the opposite both before and after the 1903 pamphlet, but the attack on one of Lenin's central works does not bear up under scrutiny.

*What is to be done* embodies Lenin's method of party building and his tactics for fusing the vanguard party with the working class movement. He never renounced it. More importantly, it is an accurate guide to how the Bolsheviks operated in the trade unions, the factory committees and the soviets throughout 1917. The Bolsheviks started out as a tiny minority in these organisations but became dominant because they brought revolutionary ideas into them, specifically the slogan: "All power to the soviets!"

Cohen either doesn't understand Lenin's argument or deliberately misconstrues it. It is not true that Lenin argues that trade union struggles "prevent any opening for socialist ideas" only that they cannot complete the task of bringing socialist consciousness to the workers:

"The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic, and more than ten years of work put in by Social-Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness."<sup>3</sup>

It was precisely the revolutionary subject, i.e. the party, that was missing in the US and Britain in the 1970s. The



shop stewards were indeed fantastically militant and at high points of the struggle spontaneously socialist, but they did not know how to turn their struggles into struggles for socialism. They lacked sufficient political consciousness to do this. However this was not their fault since the working class instrument for developing this consciousness - a revolutionary party - was missing. Worse parties did exist which were not revolutionary and thus obstructed the linkage of the massive trade unions struggles into a class wide political struggle, a struggle for power.

Cohen's assertion that the far left has damaged the union struggle by bringing its own political agenda into the unions and diverting them from their natural course is a million miles away from not only Lenin, but also Marx and Engels. Not only did the pair relentlessly campaign for the British unions to support the Irish liberation struggle, Marx drafted the resolution to the General Council of the First International calling for the construction of independent workers' parties, adding that the trade unions ought "to serve as a lever for its struggles against the political power of landlords and capitalists".

## HOW WORKERS LOST THEIR POWER...

With this theoretical grounding, we can visit the territory of Cohen's book and draw opposite conclusions.

The historically high number of union members, shop stewards and strikes in the 1970s was a result of the exceptionally long post-war boom in the USA and Britain, during which trade unionism became unusually effective for workers beyond the ranks of the labour aristocracy. Bosses would rather concede on pay and conditions than lose a full order book to rival capitalists. Strikes, quickly called at shop level and quickly won, became commonplace. Women, black and Asian workers, youth flooded into the unions.

For the same reason, the need for political action seemed distant before the 1970s. Living standards were improving, unemployment and poverty receding, democratic rights gaining ground. Strong unions existed side by side with relatively weak political formations. The Labour Party was monolithic in Britain, while no workers' party at all existed in the States.

But the synchronised world recession



Miners attacked by police during the greaqt strike 1984-5

of the mid-1970s changed all that. Employers and governments consciously took on the unions in long drawn-out strikes and lock-outs. They weakened the relationship of the shop stewards to the mass membership through anti-union laws, "teamworking" and "quality circles", and (not mentioned by Cohen) sacking a whole load of shopfloor leaders.

Cohen is right to say this was not inevitable. But she is wrong in her suggestions about what could and should have been done to prevent the decline. She claims that the layer of stewards should have been more conscious of its role, not only within the industries but across them. She says the policies they needed were those that could guide them towards building such an independent network, and fighting off bureaucratisation and incorporation by the employers.

Politics brought in from the outside are seen as part of the problem. Cohen quotes the various alternative economic projects, especially the Lucas Plan, as disastrous experiments, which meant militants took their eye off the ball of workplace organisation.

So where does Cohen go wrong?

First, the layer of stewards and workplace reps was conscious of its role in the unions. The Liaison Committee for the Defence of the Trade Unions, barely mentioned in the book, organised thousands of stewards across sectors. Cohen quotes the same stewards marching on Pentonville prison in 1972 to free trade unionist dockers, chanting, "We are the working class" and Scargill's famous speech to the engineers before the battle of Saltley Gate:

"Will you go down in history as the

working class in Birmingham who stood by while the miners were battered or will you become immortal? I do not ask you - I demand that you come out on strike."

So a network did exist, and it was aware of its existence and specific role. It was also a battleground for various political currents, the most important of which were the Communist Party of Great Britain and the Socialist Workers Party. Their policies towards the Labour Party were crucial. As Cohen points out, it was the Labour Party that introduced the social contract, a series of "give-backs", which finally broke down in the winter of discontent and the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1978-79. The "left" general secretaries, in particular Jack Jones of the TGWU, supported the policy. The CP-led LCDTU supported Jones.

In the face of such misleadership, the militant shop stewards were politically disoriented and industrially isolated. One group picked up on this discontent and grew among the stewards: the International Socialists (later to become the SWP). They launched a rank and file movement, drawing hundreds of workplace delegates to its conferences. While the IS counselled opposition to the social contract, it did so only through militant trade unionism. In fact, the IS practised what Cohen preaches: giving organisational support and a certain coherence to the struggles of the rank and file, while keeping politics - the general strike, the question of government, etc. - out of it.

It failed.

The onset of recession in the 1970s changed the rules of the game. For the bourgeoisie, it no longer became prag-



matic to concede workers' demands, or nationalise ailing industries in order to keep production rolling. The bosses needed to break the post-war consensus: destroy unproductive capital; increase unemployment; reduce the share of surplus value accruing to the working class via wage freezes and rampant inflation; use the state machinery – social security, police, courts, judges and prisons – to stamp on trade union rights. It was called monetarism then, but was in fact the foundation stone of neoliberalism. And it was pioneered in New York and under the Wilson-Callaghan governments in Britain.

Faced with a situation where pure trade unionism was weakened by the economic downturn, workers turned to politics. The problem was the kind of politics they turned to. When Ted Heath called an election in response to the miners' strike in 1974, under the campaign slogan, "Who rules the country?" the response was a definite, "Not you!" However, beyond this negative, the only answer available to millions of trade unionists and tens of thousands of stewards was another Labour government. This – far more than the Lucas Plan – proved the fatal weakness of the unions.

### ... AND HOW TO GET IT BACK

The failure of the militant 1970s' shop stewards' movement and, in the US, reform committees, like Teamsters for a Democratic Union and Hot Wheels, to transform themselves into something qualitatively better continued to be felt during the defeats of the 1980s and 1990s, and to dog attempts at recovery in the 21st century. For Cohen the answer is: return to basics. Rebuild shopfloor workers' democracy, the creative relationship between the rep and the workforce. Create a network from this layer. Unionise new sectors on the basis of winning workers directly to militant action and democratic structures.

Fine. But, even as Cohen herself admits, the unions are built through victories. How can we end the cycle of defeats and begin again on a new cycle of victories? Only by seizing control of the unions. This can and should be done from above and below. The rank and file need to be organised to place clear demands for action on the leaders – left as well as right. When those leaders hesitate, demobilise or do secret deals, the rank and file membership must be able

to take action without and against the official leadership.

A rank and file movement should also stand candidates in elections on a clear programme of both union reform and action on the major issues of the day. Cohen does not give her idea of thorough-going union reform, but we will: regular election of all union officials; all officials to be instantly recallable by a majority of those they claim to represent; all officials to be paid the average wage of the members; all disputes, strikes and negotiations to be under the democratic control of those in dispute through mass meetings and the election of strike committees.

By leaving union reform at the level of a network of shop stewards and workplace reps and merely bemoaning the failure of various attempts to elect left wing officials, Cohen leaves the rank and file movement as a parallel union structure. While correctly castigating the Broad Left strategy of focusing solely on electing left wingers, Cohen romanticises the workplace meeting:

"Their delegate-based committee structure, typical of 'spontaneous' working class organising, ensured a closeness and accountability to the membership lacking in 'representative' democracy."

Not only does Cohen have no policy to expel the parasitic bureaucracy from the unions, she downplays the importance of doing so. The bureaucracy, gratefully using the anti-union laws, stifle disputes, like the Gate Gourmet lock-out at Heathrow in August 2005. It is responsible for passing up countless opportunities to turn over the Labour government since 1997. While rebuilding of the unions, militants cannot skirt round the bureaucracy, they must confront it.

Cohen's fear of the bureaucracy is linked to her fear of politics. She castigates a Nalco branch in the 1980s for launching a campaign of strikes to smash the rate-capping legislation. But this legislation was at the heart of the cuts. It could have and needed to be smashed. The problem with the campaign was not that it was over an overtly political issues, but that it was limited to a series of one-day strikes, and to a few local authorities dotted around the country. To overcome these obstacles and to link the fight to the other disputes taking place, most importantly the miners' strike, the workers needed more policies, different policies, not simply to strike on the economic issues, for more pay and

jobs, which could only have been "won" by the council closing down services and facilities elsewhere. Cohen's strategy is a recipe for isolation.

The migrant workers' strikes of 2006-07, the potential and impact of the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements on the unions, the struggles of unions across the world during this time-span – from Argentina and Venezuela's factory occupations and workers' control movements through to the great French and Italian general strikes this century – show that workers' struggles do not mechanically travel from economics to politics.

Great upsurges in trade union history usually come about in periods of great political and social crisis – the rise of fascism and spurred millions to flood into the unions. At the root of the growth of shop stewards movement in the period before and during the first world war were anarcho-syndicalist political ideas and militants. Later communists built the Minority Movement. In the 1960s Left Labourites, Stalinists and Trotskyists competed to build up the election of Popular Fronts in France and Spain in 1936, of Roosevelt in the USA.

First, someone has to agitate for this progress. Second, there is no law that dictates that workers become class conscious because of economic issues first, and political issues later. The war on Iraq (not mentioned in the book) politicised millions of workers in the USA and Britain. It could have led to general political strike action, the breaking of the anti-union laws and a political crisis for neoliberalism and globalisation.

The Socialist Workers Party, having counselled against bringing big politics into the unions in the 1970s, found itself at the head of the antiwar movement in 2003. Yet it failed utterly to agitate for such action for fear of frightening away the left bureaucrats, who had joined the Stop the War Coalition. The SWP even turned this method – economistic tailism plus passive propaganda – into a general strategy for the unions.<sup>8</sup>

What is missing is the means to build a bridge between workers' consciousness and the historic goal of the working class: the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, the establishment of the rule of workers' councils and workers' militia, and the opening up of the path to socialism. Again, Cohen is long enough in the tooth and well read enough to know what such a bridge should be: a transi-



tional programme, updated and applied to today's conditions. But bizarrely, rather than explore what this might mean, she simply refers to Hal Draper's totally inadequate and wrong definition of a transitional demand:

"Simply to ask for, or organise around basic issues like reasonable wages, shorter hours, safety at work and (particularly in America) pensions and health benefits is to invoke the potentially transformative logic of 'transitional demands'... 'The demand for more becomes revolutionary when it goes beyond the capabilities of the system to provide the more. That is the link between the fight for reforms and social revolution...'"<sup>9</sup>

Leon Trotsky's conception of the system of transitional demands was completely different. He advocated:

"a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat... the essence of [this system of demands] is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very foundations of the bourgeois regime."<sup>10</sup>

The transitional programme does not simply consist of demands for more. It is a system of demands, which are inter-linked. It does not simply reflect workers' conscious need for more; it seeks to transform that consciousness by raising the need to conquer political power by the working class. It prepares for this by encroaching on the bourgeoisie's political and economic rights, and establishing elements of workers' control and democratic bodies to establish and maintain that control. At each stage of the struggle the ruling class is faced with a choice: escalation or capitulation.

It is this that makes the transitional method superior to simply demanding more. If Cohen looked at the programmes of the German Social Democracy and the Mensheviks, she would find demands far more militant in their reach than the ones she lists as transitional in today's conditions. But for Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, they were insufficient because they were not linked to the fight for workers' control and the seizure of power. This is the essence of socialists' tasks in relation to the trade unions. As Marx put it:

"Apart from their original purposes, [the trade unions] must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad sense of its complete emancipation. They must carry every political and social movement tending in that direction. Considering themselves and acting as the champions of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society men in their ranks... They must convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions."

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Luxemburg, R. The mass strike, the political party and the trade unions, 1906, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/ch08.htm>
- 2 Cohen, op. cit. p196
- 3 Lenin, V.I. The reorganisation of the party, 1905, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/reorg/i.htm#v10pp65-029>
- 4 Marx, K. Resolution on working class political action, 1871, *The First International and After*, Penguin p270
- 5 Cohen, op. cit. pp20-22
- 6 *ibid*, p166
- 7 See Smith, M. *The Awkward Squad*, New Labour and the Rank and File, Bopokmarks, 2003
- 8 Cohen, op. cit. p218
- 9 Trotsky, L. The transitional programme for social revolution, 1938, Pathfinder Press pp114-15
- 10 Marx, K. Trade unions: their past, present and future, Marx and Engels on the trade unions, Lapides, p65



# China's move to the market

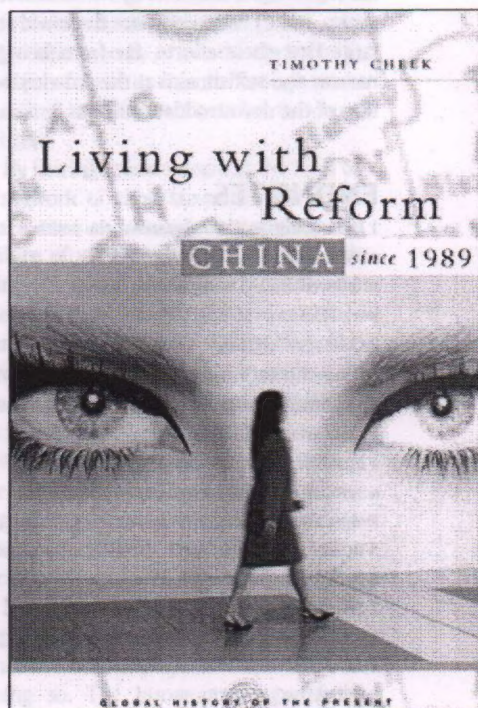
**Mark Booth** reviews *Living with Reform: China since 1989*, Timothy Cheek

This book provides an accessible introduction to the dramatic economic reforms that have taken place in China over the past 20 years. Timothy Cheek is particularly focused on the post-1989 period of Chinese history - beginning with the pro-democracy movement and its brutal repression by the Chinese state in the Tiananmen Square massacre. But he is clear to point out that this is not as much a defining moment in China's history as it is often portrayed in the West.

Rather, Cheek points to the "Southern Tour" of Deng Xiaoping in 1992 as having a much more definite effect on China's recent history. Following the tour, the 14th Party Congress gave their total support to the introduction of market economics into China's planned economy, while maintaining a commitment to political control through the instrument of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) - euphemistically called "socialism with Chinese characteristics".

The process of market reform has been going on since Mao's death and in the years following the Cultural Revolution, the CCP stabilised its rule and embarked on a process of economic reforms to revive the flagging bureaucratic plan. Cheek argues that 1992 was the point where this policy was cemented and made irreversible and marked a defeat for conservative elements in the state bureaucracy who wanted to continue with planning.

The central theme running through Cheek's book is that the driving motivation behind the actions of the CCP and its leaders for the past 30 years has been the desire to avoid the recurrence of a terrible "chaos" (luan) caused by the Cultural Revolution. He argues it caused so much unrest and instability that the rule of the CCP became threatened. For Cheek, this explains the ruthless crackdown on the pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen in 1989 and the CCP's continuing commitment to economic liberalisation while maintaining a tight hold on political power. The bureaucracy had witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and was desperate to avoid similar popular uprisings challenging their rule.



Cheek also describes how the Communist Party has a profound intolerance for any forces that challenge its right to "lead the Chinese nation" - even indirectly, as in the case of the Falun Gong religious sect. The Falun Gong's large membership and activity was beginning to alarm local government officials who saw it developing as a centre of power outside their control and so initiated a crackdown on its practitioners. Before then, it had been an accepted part of the state-sponsored qigong associations that operate within the People's Republic of China (PRC) and includes sports clubs like t'ai chi and martial arts.

The major strength of *Living with Reform* is that it makes a critical analysis of the effects of the reforms on the masses, pointing to the growing inequality and class conflict they have spawned. This, accompanied by the continuing one-party dictatorship, is creating huge economic and political contradictions in China. This

cuts against many popular bourgeois conceptions of the Chinese state that argue the market reforms will lead to long term stable economic growth and gradual political liberalisation.

Nevertheless, there are a number of problems with Cheek's analysis. Put bluntly, Cheek is not a Marxist. An immediate consequence of this, is that he has wildly incorrect ideas as to what socialism and communism are. He frequently asserts that China is "socialist" and seems to define this as an appeal to socialist values, a one party state and a mass party membership. While this is a popular view among bourgeois theorists, Marx argued socialism was a stage in human development between capitalism and communism. In this stage, production was democratically planned on a world scale to move from "each according to his ability to each according to his needs". Thus, both democracy and a world revolution were central pre-requisites for the socialist stage of human development.

This is important, because it opens up a critical Marxist inquiry of what kind of state pre-1992 China was. The CCP had come to power in a revolution, established a form of planning but with a bureaucratic dictatorship over the working class. This bureaucratic dictatorship controlled the planning process and extracted privileges from it. These Stalinist states like the USSR and its satellites, were degenerated workers states; with a bureaucratic dictatorship blocking the transition to socialism. They were therefore neither socialist or capitalist - but states where the transition to socialism was blocked. To talk, as Cheek does, of a "socialist government" and a "capitalist economy" is a contradiction in terms. It is only by seeing the actions of the CCP leadership in China, as those of a self-interested caste that the causes of the reform process can be elucidated.

Cheek frames the introduction of mar-



ket economics as a rejection of Mao and the crises ridden period of the Cultural Revolution, he argues this led to reformers in the party rejecting Marxist orthodoxy and turning to the market. Cheek points to the examples of adventurism and gross inefficiencies in the Maoist planning process. However, these are posed simply as bad policy choices, rather than a systemic problem in the bureaucratic production process. The police state meant that lower and mid-level managers would lie about production levels to meet ambitious targets, which made planning impossible, and lead to crises of disproportionate production in the plan. Without democracy, the planning system was incapable of responding to actual development needs. In response to this crisis, the CCP leadership turned to market reforms to stimulate economic growth, which began a process that was to culminate with the managed restoration of capitalism in 1992. It was precisely because the bureaucracy was a self interested caste who did not express the aspirations of the masses, that they saw an opportunity to enrich themselves through capitalist restoration.

This analysis opens up a better understanding of the contradictions in Chinese society today than Cheek's. For Cheek, the key source of instability is that the market reforms have massively increased inequality and class conflict, creating what he calls a "winners and losers" system. However, he does not see this as arising lawfully from the restoration of capitalism, as a system based on exploitation that systematically creates social disequilibrium and crisis. Like his analysis of pre-1992 China, this is for him simply a question of a certain set of policy choices, or what he calls forms of "governance". Indeed, on the international terrain too, Cheek is focused on China's political relations with the West and other Asian states, rather than how its integration into the world capitalist system has impacted on its domestic policies.

Moreover, in his political conclusion, Cheek argues the central question is stabilising the situation in China through encouraging policies that tackle social injustice and promote good governance. An important part of this, for him, is not to demonise the CCP, but engage with them and avoid "glorifying the market". He actually dodges the democratic question saying the Chinese Communist Party "...is neither the primary cause nor the ultimate solution to China's troubles." After spending a large part of the book

laying out the undemocratic practices of the CCP and its abuses of power this is a shameful omission.

While, much of *Living with Reform*, demonstrates the contradictions and crisis of the market restoration process, Cheek believes social justice and better governance can resolve the problem. What this ignores is both the new capitalist class and the mass working class that has emerged, will both over the coming years struggle for democratic rights against the regime. The contradictions and instabilities of the capitalist system, with its tendencies to breakdown, will only deepen this crisis.

Cheek does not identify capitalism as the primary source of China's problems, and does not call for any alternative, only calling for greater social justice to alleviate the poverty that Chinese workers and peasants increasingly live in, coupled with fair trade. The need for Chinese workers and peasants to struggle for greater democracy and link this with the struggle for socialist revolution to establish a real workers state is a burning necessity when faced with the immense suffering being inflicted upon the Chinese workers and peasants.

In the end, while *Living with Reform* is an interesting political introduction to Chinese politics and history, its analysis ultimately does not get to the root of the problem – a critical interrogation of the capitalist system.



# Parole possibility for Mario Bango – class war prisoner

Mário Bango, a young Roma imprisoned since 2001 for defending his brother against a racist attack, will be able to apply for early release in October of this year. As he says in his latest letter from Ilava, the hardest prison in Slovakia: "I think I have a great chance because they forgave me two years and this is a lot. But we must do everything we can to take this chance – it really will be a great success if I can be free. I can't imagine it. Really freedom – incredible!!!"

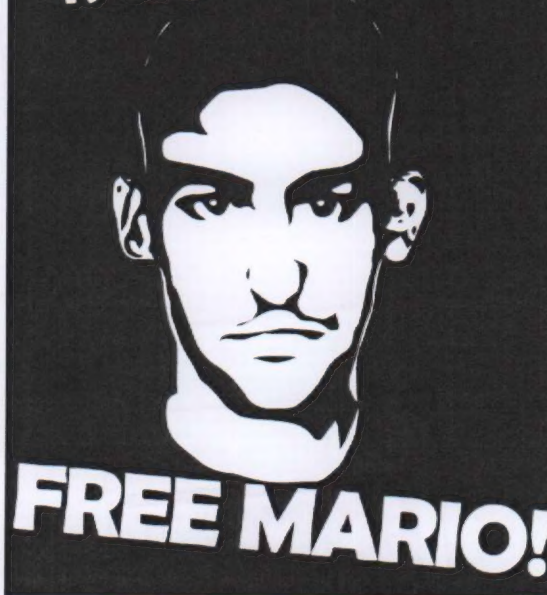
Now 25 years old, Mário has been in prison for over six years. In his letter he refers to his last appeal at the Supreme Court in August 2004 where they failed to overturn his conviction for attempted murder but reduced his sentence from the maximum of 12 years to 10 years. Last summer, his attempt to challenge the conviction at the constitutional level also failed. His only chance left is to take his case to the European court – but this could take years.

Now he has the chance of getting out of prison early on "save control". But the decision still lies in the hands of a judge – and in Slovakia Roma face institutional racism, which means they are systematically marginalised and discriminated against in employment, housing, education and the judicial system. In Eastern Slovakia, unemployment can be as high as 93% in Roma communities.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance 2004 that concluded "the Roma minority remains severely disadvantaged in most areas of life." Accordingly, the proclaimed goal of improving the situation of the Roma "has not been translated into adequate resources and a concerted interest and commitment on the part of all the administrative sectors involved." The Slovak Republic was brought before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in August 2004 to monitor its progress to end racial discrimination, including measures undertaken to remedy the serious human rights issues Roma face.

Mário has been battling state racism throughout his case, from the moment of arrest (even though he had called the ambu-

**SELF DEFENCE  
IS NO OFFENCE!**



lance and waited for the police to arrive) through his court case and numerous appeals. In order to win his freedom, he needs a strong lawyer. The Free Mário Bango Campaign is launching a fundraising drive to raise the money necessary. If you would like to make a donation for Mário's fighting fund, please send a cheque to Free Mário Bango, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX or directly to Free Mário Bango Campaign, Nationwide, Sort Code 070093, Bank Account Number: 33333334, Reference number 0270/703 851 924.

Mário also needs a guarantee for work in order to fulfil the conditions for early release. The Free Mário Bango Campaign is working on this by contacting trade union councils, and Roma and community organisations in Slovakia.

But he also needs our support. Please send him letter of encouragement to know that there are people on the outside fighting for his release.

**Mário Bango, nar. 8. 6. 1982**

**PS41**

**019-17 ILAVA**

**Slovensko/Slovakia**

You can also write to the Slovakian authorities (see [www.freemariobango.org](http://www.freemariobango.org)) to demand his release.

## **Life in prison**

Mário has been attempting to use his time in prison to educate himself – he has learned languages such as English, Spanish, French and even a little bit of Swedish so that he can communicate with people who send him letters from all across the world. He is also keen to learn German.

He continues to work in the laundry of the prison. He likes this for it gives him an opportunity to get out of his cell and talk with others, and it also makes the time pass faster. He is very keen to work when he is released. "When I get out of prison," he writes, "I want to work in factory among ordinary people because I am from ordinary folk."

He is reading books at a great speed – mostly historical and political books. He is still not allowed to

receive books or magazines from outside, nor is he allowed visitors that are not family. In September, after five and a half years in prison, he was given the chance to hug his mother.

Please give him your support. Raise the profile of his case at your union branch, student union meeting, community group, local campaigning group, and try to raise funds for his release. If you need more information on his case, go to [www.freemario.org](http://www.freemario.org).

Contact the campaign to find out more – please email [freemariobango@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:freemariobango@yahoo.co.uk).

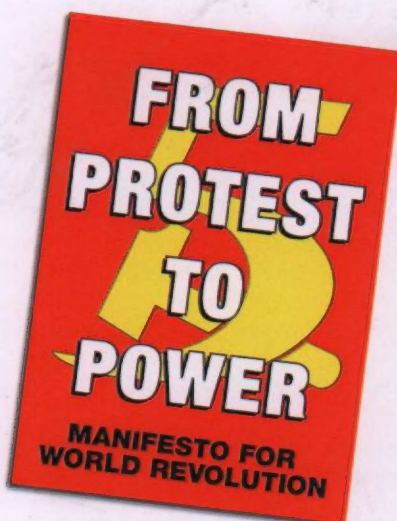
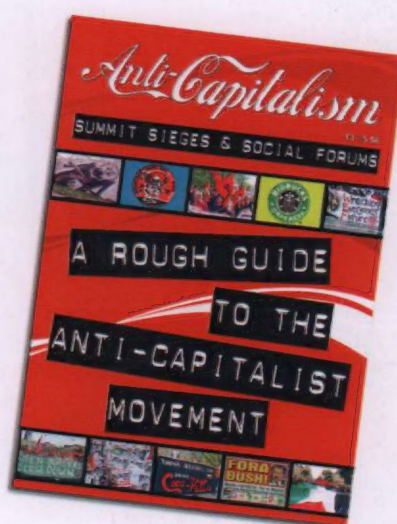
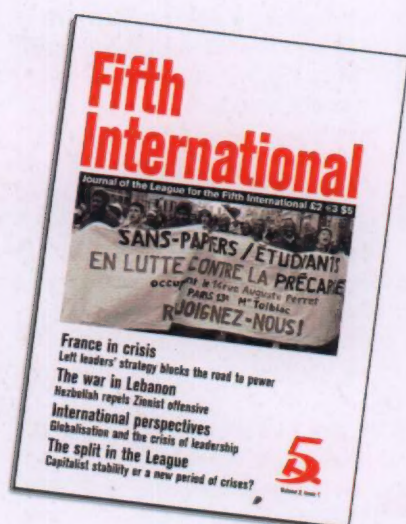
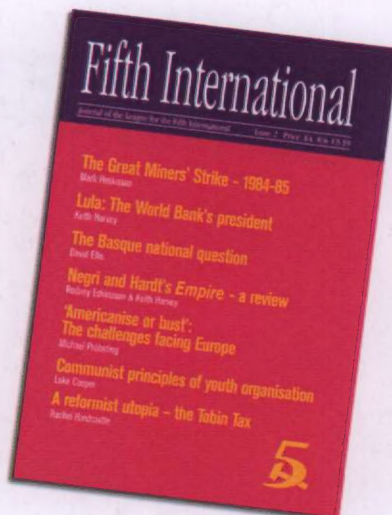
Mário would like to send his most heartfelt gratitude to all those that have petitioned, fundraised, supported his case and written letters while he has been in prison.

He wrote: "I must confess that I am a little nervous and am constantly thinking about possibility of parole. It will be incredible if I am on the outside. I will have a chance to talk with everyone who has supported me. I believe that it will be a good ending. It will be great success!! Standing strong."

**Please go to [www.freemariobango.org](http://www.freemariobango.org) for more information.**



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